

**HOW STRUGGLES TAKE PLACE: AN INQUIRY INTO THE SHIFTING RACIAL POLITICS
OF THE UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS OF AMERICA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns the changing fortunes and strategies of labor struggles by the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) in the post-war US. I use the UPWA as a lens on the restructuring of the meatpacking industry within the broader conditions of capital accumulation shaped by the articulation of labor and civil rights organizing. I trace the UPWA trajectory via a comparison between struggles in Chicago's Armour, Swift, and Wilson Locals 347, 28, 25, and in Fort Worth's Armour plant, Local 54, focusing on the limits and possibilities of place and race-based organizing within both plants and local communities. Organized resistance moved beyond the narrow confines of Trade Union mobilizing, embracing a strategy of 'community unionism' (Collins 2003) informed by increasing black militancy and demands for racial justice. Comparison of these two sites of labor organizing allows me also to analyze the trajectory of UPWA struggles insofar as the UPWA attempted to extend the Chicago experience/strategy to the labor force in Fort Worth. This juxtaposition of sites provides an analysis of the spatial relocation of meatpacking, as the disorganization of Northern urban, unionized labor became the condition for plants with predominantly rural, non-unionized labor in the mid-West and South. I rely on UPWA papers, publications, and oral histories to reconstruct the texture of infrapolitics, and to understand in what sense, and when, racialization informed organizing. My thesis is that both race and place matters in explaining shifting forms of struggle, as both opportunities for and constraints to organized resistance 'take place' in very disparate ways.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carrie Freshour grew up in Northwest GA. She earned her Bachelors of Science degree in History, Technology, and Society at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. In 2010, Carrie entered the MSc/PhD program in Development Sociology at Cornell University. While at Cornell, Carrie has served as a research intern at the Food Chain Workers Alliance, a coalition of worker-based organizations whose members plant, harvest, process, pack, transport, prepare, serve, and sell food, organizing to improve wages and working conditions for all workers along the food chain. As an intern for FCWA, Carrie helped conduct employer interviews and worker-surveys, contributing to the 2012 report, *The Hands That Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers Along the Food Chain*. Carrie continues her political work both on and off campus for racial, gender based, and economic justice.

For mom, dad, and all people struggling to provide for their communities, families, and themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Meatpacking?

Over the last fifty years, the landscapes of the rural American Midwest and South have been forever changed by the geographies of the industrialized slaughterhouse, places where an average of 4,000 animals are slaughtered each day by over 2,000 workers. Animal slaughtering and processing constitute the largest rural manufacturing employer in the United States (Martin 2012). In 2010 60 major beef-packing operations slaughtered over 35 million cattle (Ogburn 2011). The US beef industry is one of the largest receipt-earners among all agricultural industries, valued at \$87.5 billion with US residents eating over sixty-three pounds of beef a year (Breitbach 2009).

Yet 85% of the wealth of this industry remains within the hands of just four agribusinesses: Tyson Foods, Cargill Meat Solutions, JBS USA, and National Beef Packing Co., LLC (2011 USDA Grain Inspection). Despite industry concentration and growing profits, workers' real wages have been declining since the 1980s (Compa 2004). Meatpacking wages, which were once 15% higher than average manufacturing wages, have now stagnated at \$21,320 compared to average manufacturing wages of \$33,500 (Lo and Jacobson 2011). Rather than exporting workers' jobs, as in other manufacturing sectors like the auto and textile industries (Collins 2003; Milkman 1997; Bronfenbrenner 2000), the meat and poultry industries are, according to the 2004 Human Rights Watch report, "bringing in the Third World" (Compa).

These industries thrive on a workforce of immigrant, migrant, and often-undocumented Mexican, Central American, and to a lesser extent refugee¹ Southeast Asian and African “cheap” labor as over 40% of these workers are born outside of the US² (VanDeCruze and Wiggins 2008, Warren 2007). Estimates by the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC) found that over 80% of workers in the region's poultry and meat processing plants were immigrants (Lo and Jacobson 2011). Nationally, over 70% of slaughterhouse workers are workers of color (ibid.). These are the jobs that “No American *white* man wanted” as stated by an Iowa union official. Jobs that are highly undervalued as workers monotonously make over 10,000 knife-cuts in an eight hour shift with injury rates three times higher than all other manufacturing sectors (Compa 2004). These [often immigrant] workers create an attractive and very racially marked workforce as employers are aware of the difficulties in organizing across racial, cultural, and linguistic lines, especially when questions of citizenship are also on the table.

These are jobs where “Mexicans are the best workers” (employer interview, *The Hands That Feed Us* 2012), and skills become naturalized to immigrant and migrant bodies. This sort of valuation becomes double-edged, as mostly Latino/a labor is targeted and actively recruited through transnational social and familial networks, for this physically demanding, repetitive, and low-paid work. Concurrently, once upwardly mobile black workers are perceived as “lazy” or lacking a strong “work ethic” (*Mississippi Chicken* Steusse 2009) and a sort of racialized division is constructed and maintained to justify

¹ Though in an increasing number of Southern States, those with copy-cat laws to Arizona’s SB-1070, refugee workers, many from Africa, Haiti, as well as citizens from Puerto Rico are being actively recruited. (Douban and Newkirk, 2012).

² Similar estimates have been noted by Steusse (2009) in the poultry processing industry, as 50% of the over 250,000 workers are immigrants (92).

recruitment and employment practices. With turnover at 50-100% annually, and as high as 500% among new firms (Lo and Jacobson 2011), a very racialized and rightless workforce increases to meet the rising yet cheapening³ demands of meat consumers in the US. Yet, it is important to understand both the various mechanisms for cheapening the price of food *and* thus the price of labor as global meat consumption is fueled by more than just the spread of Western diets.

Racialization of Labor

A close look at meatpacking labor and organizing struggles provides a lens to the intentional use of racialization, to be understood as an ongoing and geographically distinct process, for cheapening labor, though in historically and spatially specific forms. This analysis is to take Marable, Ness, and Wilson (2006) seriously, as “capitalist wealth and power relations depend on unequal race *and* labor relations in American history. Absent racial justice, working class justice is impossible.” In doing so, I utilize the analytic of racialization not as a static *thing*, but rather as a way to explain how conceptions of race are not only constructed, but, more importantly, co-constitutive with class, temporally and geographically. Racialization, as relational process, becomes highly influential in shaping anti/capitalist struggles. Therefore, an analysis of this process must also take a more central position in the creation of future struggles.

This thesis concerns the changing fortunes and strategies of labor struggles by the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) in the post-war United States. I intend to use the UPWA as a lens on the restructuring of the meatpacking industry within the

³ In 2000, Americans spent 14.7% of food dollars on meat compared to 26.1% for urban households in 1955 (Warren 2007).

broader conditions of capital accumulation⁴ shaped by the articulation of labor and civil rights organizing. How did racialization inform not only meatpackers' use of workers but also organizing strategies and union messaging, ongoing interaction with the surrounding communities, and finally the relocation of the meatpacking industry? When and where did workers' sense of place contribute to, counter, or transform in response to UPWA directed race-based organizing? How was it that workers' sense of place became crucial in countering (or not) capitalist use of racialization?

My thesis is that the formations of place matter as expressions of shifting forms of struggle, as both opportunities for and constraints to organized resistance 'take place' in very disparate, yet connected ways. A comparison of sites, Fort Worth and Chicago, illuminates the different responses to a form of community unionism being fostered through the UPWA, as shaped greatly by the processes of racialization developing in each packinghouse community. Although a history of successful race-based organizing in Chicago is important and definitely deserves attention, this narrow focus is to only see one part of the picture. Chicago became a site of strength for the union because of the members' ability to engage in a sort of community unionism, led by black militant workers demanding justice in realms of production (the factory) but also of social reproduction, community life. In places where resistance to this style of unionism was strong, the UPWA would be short-lived.

Community Unionism

Community unionism is not just about unions linking up with community organizations, but rather this form of unionism confronts the needs and daily challenges of

⁴ Taking both Fordist and neoliberal forms.

its members beyond the traditional wage-relation, also addressing their needs for social reproduction⁵. As Jane Collins' study of community unionism in the transnational apparel industry takes on a necessarily gendered form—a mostly female workforce fighting for childcare, reproductive health, and clean water in negotiating their relationships between work, home, and family—for the UPWA, Civil Rights based organizing, race-based organizing, became essential in desegregating communities, demanding equitable housing, and openly fighting racial discrimination in the workplace and beyond. Community unionism in this sense thus attends to the needs of members not only as *workers*⁶ but also as *whole persons*.

Community unionism becomes especially important when workers do not have similar shared experiences or when social relations among workers are divided. Beyond recognizing the shop floor as the main source of strength, community unionism emphasizes alliances with other groups, embedding labor struggles in larger community issues. This is why forms of community unionism tend to come from the most marginalized worker-members, recognizing that these workers cannot separate their work lives from their home lives, cannot disaggregate what they experience in the factory from their communities – because this segment of labor is doubly discriminated against, whether as women and mothers, or racialized peoples, in both workplace and homeplace. The UPWA attempted to

⁵ “Social reproduction refers to the labor necessary to keep households and communities functioning and to allow them to send productive members out into the world. It includes the activities that reproduce and support individuals from day to day, from year to year, and across generations... The struggle to secure the conditions of social reproduction has always been intertwined with the struggle for higher wages, as workers develop historically and culturally specific arrangements for converting their pay into the goods and services needed to survive” (Collins 2012, 17).

⁶ This is Collins' important distinction between trade unionism and community unionism. Traditional trade unions with “their origins as limited-membership societies and the legacy of exclusionary ideologies led them to understate their connections to the broader communities in which they lived and worked” (Collins 2012: 16). A sort of false-separation that women in maquiladoras in Mexico or black worker-members in the UPWA are unable to perform.

enact a particularly racialized form of community unionism, recognizing the specific histories of racially marked workers, as black men and women had to negotiate relationships between work, home, and community in very different ways than their white comrades. Successful UPWA organizing drives were not only able to attend to *how* people join the struggle but *why*, asking what outside of the workplace, where people spend at least one-third of their lives, contributes to or constrains their ability to join in the struggle against capital.

Importance of Place

My aim here is not to simply compare and contrast static sites of a “progressive” pro-labor North against a “backwards” Jim Crow South, or of essentialist categories of black workers and white workers, but rather to inductively understand how workers’ consciousness, participation in direct actions, and personal understandings of race have been formed through and informed by historical-geographical social relations, put more simply, through their sense of place. This sense of place, for worker-members of the UPWA, is not determined solely by the geographic binaries of Chicago or Fort Worth but rather must be understood as connected, and co-produced through struggle. UPWA organizing strategies and successes in Chicago were dependent on an extension of struggles *inside* the plants to those *outside*, constructing Chicago as a site of strength for the union. Here, effective UPWA campaigns in Chicago not only fought for better wages, shop floor desegregation, and equal pay, but also for fair housing, desegregation of businesses, and equal access to local amenities as production and social reproduction are intimately

intertwined. Demands for human dignity and respect were not confined to the hog offals and the kill floors, but to every realm of social life.

Although the importance of the UPWA “people-power” in Chicago must not be overlooked, it is necessary to consider the union’s political power as also dependent on the geographic concentration of packinghouses. Thus, for the longevity of the movement, it was necessary for either the packers to remain in Chicago or the UPWA to organize workers nationally. While successful struggles took place in Chicago, bolstered through a politicized, militant community of black and white worker-members, the extension to other places, particularly to Fort Worth, was met with resistance and racialized division. Fort Worth was thus constructed as a site for packer mobility, welcomed by a segregated workforce and debilitated UPWA. As the Chicago-experience was not easily translated to Fort Worth, and as the industry began leaving northern urban centers like Chicago, the UPWA’s mergers and decreased bargaining strength reflect the union’s limits and the disorganizing power of capital mobility.

Mobilizations of resistance in Chicago were not geographically bound to Chicago, as the UPWA made concerted efforts to connect workers and extend civil rights across the nation. Yet the limits in connecting these geographically, historically, and culturally distinct locals, as was the case for the District 1 Armour local 347, Wilson Local 25, and Swift local 28 to Armour Local 54 in Fort Worth, were part and parcel of the larger processes of industrial restructuring that began in the late 1950s. Although the packers’ model appears to follow outsourcing trajectories in other manufacturing sectors, the difference here is that the packers were able to feed off disorganized and other racialized

labor *within* the United States, shifting production to the rural Midwest and American South.

This restructuring not only utilized racialization of a 'new breed' of workers, but also completely dismantled the revolutionary gains the UPWA had made in uniting workers across historically racialized divisions. Once the UPWA locals in Chicago began losing political-economic strength, due to the city's declining position within the industry, the UPWA simultaneously became less concerned with racial justice and community unionism instead opting for less radical politics in the form of small bargaining agreements and post-shuttering automation committees. Thus the struggles of the UPWA in constructing places of resistance in Chicago were closely linked to their ability to extend efforts to places like Fort Worth. Yet, organizing in Fort Worth, in turn, greatly depended on the strength of the Chicago international and the workers' ability to maintain political-economic power in the face of industry restructuring. The trajectories of both places were very much entwined, and served as expressions of both possibilities and constraints to UPWA-style organizing that emerged through situated places with very distinct racialized histories. Because these places are also sites linked by the process of industrial restructuring, as well as by UPWA organizing drives, their juxtaposition enables perspective on the UPWA's overall rise and fall nationally as its members sought to adjust to capital's spatial relocation and disorganization of labor.

Methodology

I rely on UPWA papers and correspondences, publications, and oral histories⁷ with both rank-and-file workers and company representatives in Chicago and Fort Worth to reconstruct the texture of infrapolitics⁸, and to understand in what sense, and when, racialization informed organizing and solidarity struggles. The majority of the material for this thesis is from a small set of a larger body of oral histories conducted between 1985-1986 by Roger Horowitz and Rick Halpern through the Wisconsin Historical Society UPWA Oral History Project⁹ (see Appendix). This two year project was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Horowitz and Halpern, as principle investigators, wanted to provide an “alternative perspective by drawing upon the points of view of the workers themselves, and uncovering information and opinions unavailable in written sources” (Horowitz and Halpern 1996, xii). Key interviewees were first selected through archival research, providing a list of prioritized interviews. A second round of active interviewees were selected through their peers. Horowitz and Halpern worked closely

⁷ A majority of the interviews I use were conducted by Roger Horowitz and Rick Halpern through the Wisconsin Historical Society, United Packinghouse Workers of America Oral History Project. These interviews were conducted by the interviewees in respondents’ homes, offices, union halls, and various other places. Over the course of two years, from 1986 to 1987, Horowitz and Halpern interviewed 117 former UPWA members and 11 people who had close contact with the union, across various locals around the country. During the summer of 2012, I traveled to the Wisconsin Historical Society, where I listened to and transcribed many of the interviews before deciding on the comparative study of Fort Worth and Chicago. See the appendix for a complete interview guide.

⁸ Infrapolitics here refers to James Scott’s redefinition of politics as central to understanding not only *how* but *why* people become involved in social movement struggles, grassroots organizing, and ‘everyday forms of resistance.’ An understanding of ‘politics’ may not be dichotomized into the “political” public sphere and the “private” personal sphere avoiding the simple separation of economy from safety, well-being, health, pleasure, culture, sex, and mobility. Infrapolitics allows for an opening up of an analysis of resistance, to people with little formal political power (Scott 1987). Infrapolitics is important not as an alternative to “formal” politics, but rather a way of gauging the political power, or lack thereof, of the resisters (Kelley 1996).

⁹ From this point forward I will refer to this simply as UPWAOHP.

with former UPWA members, and officials of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the successor union to the UPWA for the meatpacking industry.

Interviews were loosely structured, and conducted jointly by Halpern and Horowitz. Information about packing communities, work/union activities, race relations, and the lived experiences of women and workers of color reached across all interviews. Over the course of two years, Halpern and Horowitz interviewed 117 former UPWA members, and 11 people who had close contact with the union. Out of these interviews, 85 were white (67 men and 18 women), 42 were black (28 men and 14 women), 1 was Latina. All 300 tapes of the interviews are deposited at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

During the summer of 2012, I traveled to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin to begin analysis of these interviews. First I spent four days reading through the detailed, though abbreviated, paper transcripts of the interviews. Although I knew I wanted to focus on the process of racialization informing UPWA organizing, I did not pre-select interview sets. For the scope of this thesis, I chose to focus on interview sets from Chicago, because of the exemplary wealth of information around the specific Chicago-style Civil Rights organizing, the fascinating stories of each workers' personal connection to the great migration, and the sense of strength and empowerment that shown through many of the workers' interviews.

Secondly, I selected the interview set with workers in Fort Worth as these interviews presented a sort of challenge to the Chicago-style organizing efforts of the UPWA. The desegregation conflict that arose in Fort Worth in 1951 also emerged as a pivotal moment in the union's history, and was discussed by multiple workers in Chicago and all of the workers in Fort Worth. Finally, the many conflicting, yet intersecting themes

which arose out of the Fort Worth interviews provided a vantage point of the overall movement beyond the rosy picture painted by most UPWA historians. After selecting these two geographically disparate sets, I used Dedoose software to code inductively, constructing major themes that spanned across both sets of interviews. I hope that the analysis that follows reflects this sort of inductive process, with great respect to the oral histories of the participating UPWA members.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the United Packinghouse Workers of America

The radical organizing of the UPWA, founded in 1943 out of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) affiliated Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) of 1937, began in the stockyards neighborhoods of Upton Sinclair's Chicago. The UPWA stood apart from other packinghouse unions at the time through their explicit efforts of uniting workers across racially divided black-white lines. In 1941 the UPWA had already instated a nondiscrimination clause against employees, which was updated in 1950 to also include applicants. Also in that year, the national convention adopted an anti-discrimination program and established an entire department devoted to implementing this program, headed by black international vice-president, Russel Lasley (Halpern and Horowitz 1996). According to the race-relations study conducted by John Hope II of Fisk University, by the 1950s blacks were stewards of 83% of the UPWA's locals and held positions on 73% of the executive boards (Halpern and Horowitz 1996). This amount of black leadership was unprecedented at the time, and became incredibly meaningful for many of the black workers and packinghouse communities.

As exemplified in the slogan "Negro, White, Unite, Fight!" racial justice was a priority for the UPWA, strengthening the union and fueling innovative direct actions. These actions, such as seemingly "spontaneous" work floor stoppages, concerted slow-downs, and nationwide general strikes (1946 and 1948) resulted in post-war wage increases, reinstatement of laid-off workers, national-level plant desegregation, alleviation of regional, racialized, and gendered wage-differentials, and protective union contracts. Additionally, because of the unique focus on civil rights, the UPWA also fought against segregation and

discrimination in the surrounding packinghouse communities, empowering black and white packinghouse workers to action that extended beyond the traditional labor dispute.

Despite the gains made by the UPWA, specifically at the international-level in Chicago, the union's broad reach was not sustained. The great strength was largely Chicago-centric, and was severely debilitated once the packers began relocating their firms. Starting in the late 1950s the largest packing companies began closing their doors in northern cities, and in the early 1960s many relocated to smaller, more rural towns near cattle supplies. IBP, Inc. (now Tyson owned) made the first move in 1960, opening a plant in the small town of Denison, Iowa (Stull and Broadway 2004). With the introduction of boxed beef in 1967, IBP began building more plants in small rural towns on the High Plains (ibid., Horowitz 1998). This rural restructuring of the industry forced all of the old urban plants to close, and caused the old packers to sell out and merge with these "new breed" packers owned by IBP, ConAgra, and Cargill. With the urban leadership of the UPWA experiencing a major loss of political-economic power, the once staunchly oppositional CIO-UPWA merged with the concessionary AFL backed Amalgamated in 1968, losing not only militant and effective organizing strategies but also the foundational power of race-based mobilizing.

The trajectory of UPWA struggles sheds light on capitalist power relations at large, revealing the constraints on labor and how labor responded through 'everyday forms of resistance.' These forms provide reflections on the importance of workers' changing sense of place in shaping labor resistance. I emphasize two issues. First, I trace the UPWA trajectory via a comparison between workers' struggles in the Armour, Swift, and Wilson plants in Chicago and in the Armour plant in Fort Worth, focusing on the limits and

possibilities of place and race-based organizing through direct action within both plants and local communities. The distinction to this labor-capital narrative is an understanding of co-conditional organizing in each place. The strength of Chicago locals greatly shaped the trajectory of unionism in Fort Worth, while the existence of Southern strongholds influenced the restructuring of the industry and subsequent state of power in Chicago. And second, I explore the role of community unionism. Community unionism (Collins 2003) traces instances where organized resistance moved beyond the narrow confines of trade union mobilizing. In the case of the UPWA, community unionism was informed by black militancy, demands for racial justice, and concern with (re)production beyond the slaughterhouses. In juxtaposing these two sites, I show that the relative strength of community unionism, depending as it does on specific racial demographics and cultural patterns in each place, influenced both labor's organizing ability and therefore capital's mobility.

A comparison of these two sites of meatpacking labor organizing also provides a deeper understanding of the trajectory of UPWA struggles insofar as the UPWA attempted to extend the Chicago experience and strategy to the labor force in Fort Worth. This juxtaposition of sites provides an analysis of the spatial relocation of meatpacking, as the disorganization of Northern, urban, unionized labor became the condition for plants with predominantly rural, non-unionized labor in the mid-West and South.

Such a relational comparison provides the opportunity to specify the changing fortunes and strategies of the UPWA. In particular, it allows a focus on the changing role of racial politics within the UPWA as it grappled with capital's differential tactics of

racialization¹⁰ across both meatpacking sites. The successful black-white coalitions and emerging black militancy in Chicago provide expressions of the transformed demographics of this urban cultural and industrial center and the strength of black workers within the UPWA in mobilizing around racial justice. Their power was established not only in their growing numbers and wartime experiences, but also through their increased political-economic strength and community support in response to the packers' attempts to "divide-and-conquer." Despite the attempts to extend the Chicago-experience to Fort Worth with a similar focus on racial justice, the entrenched cultural geographies of the Jim Crow South, and the historically different organizing capacities afforded to black, and to a lesser extent Latino/a, workers at that time hostilely confronted extension efforts. With little community support and declining power in Chicago, Fort Worth packers were able to maintain a racially divided workforce to their advantage, both fleeing from powerful UPWA organizing in Chicago while simultaneously intensifying a racially divided and disorganized workforce.

The Chicago Experience

Preamble, United Packinghouse Workers of America Constitution, 1943

We recognize that our industry is composed of workers of all nationalities, of many races, of different creeds and political opinions. In the past these differences have been used to divide us and one group has been set against another by those who would prevent our unifying. We have organized by overcoming these divisive influences and by recognizing that our movement must be big enough to encompass all these groups and all opinions. We must always be alert and ready to strike down any attempt to divide us. We must destroy the

¹⁰ I use the term racialization, as developed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant "to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group. Racialization is an ideological process, and historically," and I would add geographically, "specific one" (Omi and Winant 1994, 64). Race, therefore is not innate, psychological, or transhistorical, but a product of conscious and historically specific racial projects that imbue racial identities with determinant social meanings.

*possibility of disunity through the education of our membership in the spirit of solidarity with
a view to eliminating all prejudices.*

[Table 1]

UPWA- Chicago Timeline

1904 Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen strike fails
1919 Race Riots in Chicago
1921-1922 Amalgamated strike fails
1937 CIO-Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) is established
1939 PWOC established at Armour
1943 UPWA Established, Chicago as International headquarters
1948 General Strike
UPWA District headquarters moves from Back-of-Yards to Brownsville
1953 Swift & Co. closes
1955 Wilson & Co. eliminates killing operations
1957 Wilson & Co. Plant closes
1959 Armour Plant closes
1966 UPWA brings Martin Luther King Jr. to Chicago
1968 UPWA merges with Amalgamated Meat Cutters
1970 Chicago's Union Stock Yard closes

Meatpacking in the US began in terminal cities like New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati in the mid 19th century (Stull and Broadway 2004). The “disassembly” lines provided innovative technology that pre-dated Ford's assembly line. Yet the unique *nature* of the product, the irregularly sized bodies, seasonal births, late arrivals, and unpredictable process of the killing lines depended and continues to depend upon human labor (Pachirat 2011). The structure of the meatpacking labor force in the 19th century depended on a core of highly skilled workers in addition to a larger, more flexible workforce that could be increased or decreased quickly depending on the fluctuations of supply and demand. At the turn of the century, the meatpackers found their ideal workforce, “destitute immigrants who poured into packinghouses to work long hours for little pay” (Page 1998, 268). This surge is evident in the industry employment rates that increased from around 8,000 in 1870 to over 60,000 by 1900 (Stanley 1994; Horowitz 1998).

Chicago provided the center of the nation's meatpacking industry. Subsequently it was here that the first organizing attempts by meatpacking labor began in the late 19th and early 20th century. These early efforts culminated in an Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen¹¹ strike in 1904. In this strike workers demanded higher wages, union recognition, and collective bargaining rights. This strike ended in disaster, as the packers were able to bring in black strikebreakers from the South via special trains as a sort of "strike insurance," relying on blacks to get the packers through the strikes.

Black labor became increasingly valuable for many reasons. First of all, their labor was less expensive. The racialized nature of their labor greatly differed from other "ethnic minorities" as the materiality, the blackness of their skin, greatly mattered. As labor historian Harold M. Baron notes, "blacks in the early twentieth century frequently said that the first English word an immigrant learned was 'nigger' (1971, 29). The distinction of black workers from Euro-immigrant workers was quickly and strategically established. Second, immigration from Eastern Europe was closed off during WWI.¹² Third, many served as "unknowing" strikebreakers loyal to their employers. Because the first black workers came from very low paying jobs or sharecropping work in the South, the packinghouses of the North provided relatively massive amounts of upward mobility. Todd Tate, a packinghouse worker in Chicago reflected on why the relationship between the packers and many black workers was so strong, "used to have run-down shoes and beat up old jalopies." But after the war, "you're driving a Cadillac, wearing a suit and tie." (Tate in Halpern and Horowitz 1996).

¹¹ Will now be referred to as "Amalgamated."

¹² Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1929), 100.
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5078>.

In this way, the packers initially provided black workers with an essential “social safety net” and the rare means for material advancement. For example, Swift & Company in Chicago was known for their paternalism in the treatment of workers, by providing an employment benefit fund, assisting with late rent payments, providing symbolic pension plans, and sending lawyers when necessary to intervene on workers’ or workers’ children’s behalf (UPWAOHP). Being drawn to the North for cultural and economic factors, newly arrived Southern blacks established a sort of loyalty to the packing companies, as contrasted to the places from “whence they came,” places steeped in Jim Crow traditions and closed opportunities. Many of the first generation of black packinghouse workers were not far removed from Southern plantation slavery, as some of their parents and most of their grandparents had been legally enslaved. Thus, a distinctly Southern, black, historical consciousness led many of these new industrial workers to become dependent on their paternal employers.

By the start of WWI, meatpacking accounted for about half the employment of black men in the North. Yet, most black workers still did not trust the unions. They were the biggest holdouts in the Socialist led 1917-1919 organizing drive for an eight-hour workday, wage increases, and union recognition. After the 1921 wartime agreements expired, the “Big Five” announced industry wide wage cuts and re-instated the 10-hour workday. In 1922 labor responded with an Amalgamated-led strike that was again met with failure as black workers were used as scabs. White workers, like active union member Gertie Kamarcyzck, who experienced the 1921 Chicago strike as a 14-year old canning room operative, could understand blacks distrust of whites. She saw cross-racial organizing as hopeless as “we just didn’t understand, and they didn’t understand. We lost the union

because of that, and I didn't think we was ever going to have one again, not with so many coloreds in there" (UPWAOHP). Polish organizer John Wrublewski, recalled the failure of the 1921 strike, expressing a similar distrust and lack of understanding, stating, "Negroes had committed the greatest sin possible and there simply was no forgiveness, at least not in this world" (ibid.). Company unions were established between 1920-1930, wages fell, and the more radical sects of Amalgamated were purged (Page 1998).

This division and distrust was not entirely unfounded. Many black workers interviewed in the UPWAOHP cited the AFL-backed Amalgamated as the "white man's union," and distrusted the largely Euro-immigrant and native-born white leadership. This sentiment is expressed in the Wisconsin Historical Society's UPWAOHP interview with leader, Phil Weightman as he recounted his first experience with Amalgamated. This interaction deeply tainted his trust of labor organizing thereafter and "destroyed [his] desire for unionism." During a post-WWI organizing campaign at a Labor Day parade, Weightman, a due-paying member of Amalgamated, was turned down from receiving a sandwich because he was in the whites-only line. "I said, 'what?' You don't serve me in this line?" I looked over there; there were blacks in that line. I wasn't accustomed to that. In Mississippi, yeah, but I thought I had got away from that!" (UPWAOHP). This was an experience he had in the liberating city of Chicago. He reflected on not even thinking about race, but rather "fighting the boss," yet this experience forced him to be more discerning when working with labor unions.

Amalgamated's narrow focus on traditional battles for wages and benefits simultaneously neglected to respond to the changing northern communities. Beyond the interpersonal level expressions of individual racism among members of Amalgamated, the

union lacked any explicit, formalized attention to racial justice. With no contractual or constitutional agreement to even give lip service to Civil Rights, Amalgamated's inaction served to actively dissuade black support. With an all-white Protestant membership, no larger vision for social justice was able to develop.

Workers weren't the only ones conscious of these divisions as companies enthusiastically utilized racial divisions, pitting Irish, Polish, Croatian, and native-born white workers against Southern black workers, to their advantage. The packer-fueled tension this caused is reflected in the number of race riots across many northern cities: NYC in 1900, Indianapolis in 1903, Springfield in 1908, East St. Louis in 1917, and Chicago in 1919. Racialization clearly framed the Northern labor struggle. For the meatpacking industry, these dividing lines became deeply entrenched in Chicago until the post-war period. For places in the Deep South, as in the Fort Worth experience, it is unclear whether these divisions were ever broken.

With little formal political or social power, newly arrived southern blacks were quickly consumed for the purposes of the meatpackers and relegated to the most undesirable and lowest-paid positions, on the killing floors, fertilizer and freezer rooms, hog and beef offals, and rendering and glue departments. These divisive tactics were intentional and very successful in not only occupationally dividing workers, but also spatially dividing them. Yet, as black workers' numbers grew, and communities were firmly established in Chicago, these workers would form powerful cross-race coalitions with the Left and Communist Party eventually leading successful resistant actions and making great gains for meatpacking labor in the inter and post-war period. These rank-and-file workers

would become increasingly less pro-company, no longer viewing firms as outlets for escape from Jim Crow South.

The Great Migration and Black Consciousness

*We look up at
the high southern sky...
we scan the kind black faces
we have looked upon since we first saw the light of day,
and, though pain is in our hearts,
we are leaving.*

--Richard Wright 1941, *12 Million Black Voices*

Between 1890 and 1930 1,576,000 African Americans left the south, over 300,000 settling in Chicago. There are many explanations for this “great migration.” African Americans were drawn to cities in the North as a less-oppressive region, pulled by newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* which was frequently smuggled into the South (Massey and Denton 1993) and stories of better wages and working conditions which spread through familial networks. Transformations in agricultural production to less labor-intensive methods in addition to poor crop yields and declining prices also played a major role. Lastly, active recruitment on the part of northern industry attracted many African Americans as strikebreakers, even providing the transportation as with the meatpacking example. Yet, as wartime production grew and European immigration declined, efforts were increased to spur migration for more general labor positions in cities across the North (Baron 1971).

Not only did the “great migration” change the demographics of many Northern cities, but places like Chicago also became viewed as synonymous with freedom and opportunity. This was so particularly in the Southside neighborhoods and around

Washington Park, as these spaces quickly became cultural centers for black consciousness and the rise of liberation movements like Garveyism. Particularly interesting was the sort of “Red-Black” alliances that developed in Chicago, similar to those reflected in the writings of Langston Hughes and other writings published in *The Liberator* (Halpern 1997, Perkins 1971). This adaptation to an old Negro spiritual, *No Mo’, Mo’ Mo’* reflects a growing, but distinctly black, Left (Kelley 1996).

No mo’ pickin cotton fo’ ten
cents a day,
No mo’ raisin’ taters without
gittin’ pay.
Yo gits no bread in church fo’
pray:
No mo’ God, no mo bosses, we
folkses say.

Negroes ain’ black—but RED!
Teacher Lenin done said
Brothers all oppressed an’ po.’
Ain’t it so? Sho!

No mo’ KU-KLUX KLAN with
their burnin’ crosses.
No mo’ chain-gangs, we’re no
dogs no’ ho’ses.
The NAACP, God no’ Moses
can stop us blackies fightin’
the bosses.

(*The Liberator*, in Kelley 1996).

This poem reflects the many-faceted struggle, against white supremacists like the KKK, middle-class blacks like the NAACP, and capitalist bosses like the owners of the

packinghouses. This emerging black-left was essential to UPWA organizing in Chicago, one that was largely missing from most areas of the American South.¹³

Although black meatpacking workers were still relegated to the lowest-paid, least-skilled, and most undesirable positions in the slaughterhouses, these positions were strategically essential to successful labor struggles. As noted by Memphis born, self-declared ‘supermilitant’ organizer and former president of Local 25, Sam Parks, “You can’t slice no bacon if we don’t kill no hogs! After we got blacks in there, then the white workers saw the strength; they saw that naked power” (UPWAOHP). In many of the Chicago locals, it took black workers to not simply join, but *lead* the labor struggles. Even those lily-white departments most reluctant to join the union, like the women in sliced bacon and the men in the mechanical departments and in the stockyards, were pushed by pragmatic necessity. Because of their strategic positions on the kill floors and in the loading docks, black workers and the black working-class communities they created demanded visibility and attention from labor leaders on the Left and organizers in the movement. Once white rank-and-filers saw the bosses could no longer use their black coworkers as “strike insurance,” instances of cross-race solidarity were able to develop. These struggles transformed not only the packinghouses but also the stockyards communities of Chicago.

By the 1930s, black labor was firmly established as a large and permanent component of the meatpacking workforce. During and after WWII, 50-70,000 black Southerners moved to Chicago. This second phase of the “Great Migration” brought black men and women under very different conditions than the previous migration. Although companies continued to actively seek out black labor, wartime conditions provided a very

¹³ Although Kelley (1990) does well to document the little-known history of the black-led Communist Party in Alabama, dispelling any broad assumption of an anti-left South.

different political-economic environment. During the interwar period, black men and increasingly black women were able to move to more desirable positions within meatpacking as white workers moved to higher paying industries engaged in war-time production.

Many black workers also gained experience fighting in segregated units in WWII and thus developed a new form of black consciousness that was less responsive to the paternal relationship created by company unions in earlier periods. This race-based consciousness can be understood in black workers' comparisons of packinghouse working conditions to slavery. These were connections that white workers were unable to make, "they were most anxious to try to get out from under that bondage that they were working under" (Charlie Hayes, UPWA OHP). Comparisons of working conditions to a historical experience of "bondage" provided a rallying point for black workers, especially in a time and place that was *supposed* to provide a haven from the Jim Crow South. For black workers from the South who had directly experienced such deep seeded racism *back then* and *down there*, to face ongoing discrimination was intolerable. This sentiment is powerfully articulated by Parks,

They treated workers in that Wilson plant just like I happened to see when I was a kid living in the South in Memphis, the way I saw white people treat workers down there. And I figured, hell, this is Chicago! This is supposed to be the home of freedom. Ain't no white man got no business doing no Negro that way up here. So I started to protest at the manner and the way that the white foremen related to the black workers. I called for a sit-down in our department until we got grievances settled. Management threatened to fire me, but when they threatened to fire me all of the guys walked out and said they wouldn't touch anything, and they wouldn't allow Dock Williams or Mary Wilson¹⁴ to negotiate for me. Once I started

¹⁴ Dock Williams and Mary Wilson served as the local president and secretary treasurer when Parks and Hayes began organizing the Wilson plant in the early 1940s. Williams was often portrayed as an 'Uncle Tom' pretending to charismatically lead black workers with Wilson leading white workers, while actually serving the union (Hayes and Parks, UPWA OHP)

protesting, it started spreading. Other cases come up in other departments of the plant (UPWAOHP).

According to Parks, he began organizing workers explicitly against the overt discrimination used by his foreman, and the subsequent wage differentials this division created for the meatpackers.

Although black leaders in the UPWA acknowledged the assistance they received from white workers and organizers, especially on the Left, the importance of blackness, of race-based unity, remained primary.

I embraced the ideology of Left progressive thinking people, black and white, because I thought it was in the best interests of black people in particular, and black and white people generally. Remember how I put this: black people in particular, and black and white people generally. I put our cause first" (Sam Parks, UPWAOHP).

Parks saw the larger necessity of black-white solidarity for broader struggles for economic justice, but still, his primary concern was of black people. "Black people" and not just "black workers" in the case of Chicago, as the packinghouses became synonymous to the packingtown communities they created. But, what is distinct about black leaders in the UPWA, and their struggle, or as Parks states, "*our* cause," is their position as black working-class, distinct both from their white co-workers on the left, and the "silk stocking, tea sipping" middle-class blacks of more formally established organizations like the NAACP (Sam Parks, UPWAOHP).

Another distinction of this new, less complicit workforce was developed through an industrial labor experience. This difference is noted by Herb March, "instead of having workers who were just off a farm, you had an industrialized group of black workers who had all this experience of exploitation" (UPWAOHP). Additionally, the CIO's wartime no-strike agreements paralleling increased production demands, necessitated a new form of

direct action militancy. The UPWA became known for novel tactics and organizing methods that greatly depended on black rank-and-file leadership, workers with intimate knowledge of the pace of production on the kill floors and loading docks. This “constant militancy around issues was at the heart of the functioning of the union, and this had as a result a rank-and-file that was unusually militant” (Herb March, UPWAOHP), distinguishing the newer largely black meatpacking workers in Chicago from other CIO unions.

Although there existed an international office, president and staff, the UPWA’s emphasis on rank-and-file leadership and representation at the bargaining table constructed a union that depended on broad participation and “people power” at the local-level. Rather than a top-down hierarchy of the international dictating the direction of the locals, the democratic structure incubated a network of many capable individuals who were able to successfully coordinate “job actions,” orchestrate slowdowns and stoppages, and lead seemingly spontaneous¹⁵ direct action strikes like the “Rizz-ma-tizz.”¹⁶ One illustrative example is of Sam Parks’ transformation of the lily-white departments in the Chicago Wilson plant. Parks’ re-telling portrays the militancy and self-dignity that was fostered at the Wilson plant with the support of the union,

I led a bunch of black workers, beef kill and hog kill, with blood on ‘em and every other mother-fuckin’ thing and went into the Wilson office and we sat all on top of the fuckin’ desks. Scared the shit out of the superintendent and everybody else. All of them black workers with knives, blood dripping, sweat, scared them poor white women in that office to death! They were screaming; they figured a revolution had come! I said we’re not moving till you give us an agreement. And we sat there while they called the national office of Wilson. The answer was, they would hire black

¹⁵ These were forced to appear spontaneous, after the passing of the Taft-Hartley bill (1947), where unions were legally mandated to provide prior notice of strikes (Horowitz 1997).

¹⁶ Shop-floor leaders would walk across the floor with arms crossed or their hat cocked to one side. Workers would then begin moving furiously, with abandon, seeming to be working really fast but in actuality cutting down on production (Halpern 1997).

women. They had to do it, because I had 'em by their balls. No packing plant's worth a damn without the ability to process meat" (UPWAOHP).

Because this action was unforeseeable and impossible to contain, and because it originated from the kill floor, departments in which the entire production line depended, managers could do very little once actions began. This action was also successful because of the confidence Parks had in winning the agreement at the national level and the strength of his local at the bargaining "table."¹⁷ Informal organizing stemmed from workers' unique and intimate knowledge of production in practice, allowing for control and power at least over the day-to-day. As reflected in this instance, utilitarian interests of the company's fear of profit loss, as hanging carcasses were not allowed to stay for more than twenty minutes without being declared unfit by health and safety standards, and the physical threat of militant black workers feared by the "poor white women" in the hiring office, both worked to push the Wilson plant to hire black women.

The members of the UPWA were notably more aggressive and militant, demanding control not only over wages and benefits, but also over line speed, distribution of work, seniority protection, and department integration. Put in another way, the rank-and-file were concerned with their autonomy, with their sovereignty as workers, and with their dignity as members of the packinghouse community. Not only were black workers integral to the UPWA, but many black workers also held leadership positions, like Jesse Vaughn, Pete Davis, Crawford Love, George Villavaso, "supermilitant" Sam Parks, and Phil Weightman, who would become VP of UPWA (Halpern 1997, Horowitz 1997). This

¹⁷ Member representatives were present at the annual national bargaining agreements, present at the formal "table." But, as in this instance, the worker-members themselves forced Wilson to agree to their demand to hire black women, thus forcing the company to the bargaining table (in this case a distraught call from the company's superintendent) completely on their own terms.

seemingly unified force, across racial, ethnic, and department lines, struck fear across the “Big Five,” as quoted in a national trade magazine, “We are facing more than industrial upheaval, we are facing class warfare” (*National Provisioner* 1937 in Halpern 1997, 162).

The strength of the developing cross-race alliances, lead by black and white leaders of the Left in Chicago provided the unity necessary for plant-wide organizing. Through this UPWA-fostered unity, black workers could no longer be used as company scabs, and protections of whiteness could no longer be used to differentiate wages and divide organizing efforts. These efforts of the Chicago locals provided the foundations for a successful nation-wide, cross-industry movement, transforming not only the labor-capital relations of the meatpacking industry, but also the social relations of the surrounding communities.

“Black, White, Unite, and Fight!”

Organized labor can be one of the most powerful instruments to do away with this evil that confronts our nation that we refer to as segregation and discrimination. It is certainly true that the forces that are anti-Negro are by and large anti-labor, and with the coming together of the powerful influences of labor and all people of good will in the struggle for freedom and human dignity, I can assure you that we have a powerful instrument.

--Martin Luther King, Jr. 1957 UPWA conference

What drew people to the UPWA, particularly black working-class communities previously excluded from the long labor history of the white industrial Left, was the union’s efforts to center racial justice at its inception. This is the difference that actually made a difference in organizing with distrustful and even openly hostile black workers. The white Left, particularly the Communist Party in Chicago played a critical role in early organizing efforts. Herbert March, a white leader of the Communist Party and active member of the UPWA, hailing from Brooklyn’s Young Communist League, recalled that the first target of

the UPWA was Armour's use of the "star system." This system allowed managers to distinguish the time-punch cards of black workers with a star so that when they were called to layoff a number of workers they could easily fire black workers first.

Black workers were in an especially precarious situation during the war, when production demands waxed and waned with fluctuations in demand. To add to these variations in production, all CIO organized industries had agreed not to strike or stop production as part of a war-time agreement called the "No-Strike Pledge."¹⁸ This not only disproportionately created a vulnerable position for black workers, but also fostered racial division as an additional "wage of whiteness" (Roediger 1999). This sort of advantage or compensation by a public and psychological wage of status, resulted in social and material gains for white workers at the expense of black workers *and* labor unity (Du Bois in Roediger 1999). Thus, in dismantling the star-system, the UPWA dismantled both the material and social-psychological wage at the union's inception.

Ties to the Communist Party in urban Chicago, sustained the UPWA and connected workers to established community leaders. The openly Communist leadership out of Local 28 was attributed to pushing antidiscrimination in hiring practices across the industry. At the Swift and Company plant, this local created their own grassroots discrimination study conducted by community members. Black workers would go into the hiring office, looking for jobs. If these workers were turned away, a group of white workers would soon follow pretending to also look for jobs. When the white workers were subsequently hired, Local 28 filed a lawsuit against Swift, winning based on racial discrimination (Herbert March,

¹⁸ The unconditional no-strike pledge developed out of a labor-industry meeting called by President Roosevelt on December 11, 1941, after the Pearl Harbor attack. In addition to the no strike and no lockout pledge, the President set up a War Labor board to handle war-time labor-industry disputes (Glaberman 1980, p.1-4).

Sam Parks, Charlies Hayes UPWA OHP). This action required the participation of black and white workers alike, and, at the 1950 national convention, pushed the UPWA to re-evaluate their focus on anti-discrimination. Rather than focusing solely on anti-discrimination within the plant *after* being hired, the UPWA extended their industry-wide policy to include hiring practices. This was a radical transformation and reflected the workers' everyday experiences with racism in the lily-white, women-dominated front offices.

Although many members of the Left and Communist Party, like Herb March, were important to UPWA cross-race mobilizations, the physical presence and social interaction that place-based organizing allowed outweighed formal ideology for many. This importance of meeting immediate needs was expressed by Richard Saunders, union founder at Chicago's Armour plant, "I didn't care about nobody joining the Communist Party...The thing was issues, the issues that were important to people. And some of these guys, Communists or no Communists, they dealt with issues" (UPWA OHP). Similar ideas were expressed by rank-and-file member Vicky Starr, "You didn't talk about socialism *per se*. You talked about issues and saw how people reacted... You couldn't talk about socialism and what it meant in an abstract sense. You had to talk about it in terms of what it would mean for that person" (ibid.). "The issues," according to these rank-and-filers, depended on the needs of the community and emerged from the communities themselves. People then found hope in the Communist Party's ability to address these issues. This strength in action enabled a growing sense of trust among black workers and the white-dominated CP, foundational to the establishment of the UPWA.

Most notably, Lowell Washington, a black rank-and-file member of the UPWA cited the Communist Party as important not necessarily because of their (formal) "politics" but

because “they took up the things that really mattered—jobs, food, places to live. You might not agree with them all the time, but you had to stand with ‘em when they was fightin’ for you. You’d be a fool not to” (interview with Rick Halpern, in Horowitz and Halpern 1997). Thus unity between members of the CP and the UPWA, often one-and-the-same, were able to center desegregation of jobs and unemployment, opening access of public housing to all, and providing strike kitchens and grocery store credit during times of hardship (UPWAOHP). This is the place of *infrapolitics* which strengthened the rank-and-file unionism of the UPWA.

Even workers who were anti-formal politics, anti-union, and even hostile towards most unions, were swayed when the meatpackers threatened their own livelihoods and the livelihoods of their friends. Again, Phil Weightman is useful here as he openly became a “belligerent, evil, cantankerous employee of Swift and Company,” because they fired a guy who Weightman knew “was doing his job,” who was “working beside [him] every day of his life” (UPWAOHP). This sentiment is coming from a black worker who had previously been apathetic to unions. The unjust firing of his co-worker was not only a threat to his own position on the line, but also a guy who he personally *knew* and thought highly of, a man who had done nothing wrong.

In 1952, extending racial solidarity in action, the UPWA established an Anti-discrimination Committee, and restructured bargaining contracts with the packers so that plant segregation became illegal at the national level. Not only did they successfully integrate the shop floor’s most high paying positions and formerly “clean-lily-white” departments, locker rooms, and lunchrooms before desegregation was federally mandated

in 1954,¹⁹ members of the Chicago locals also fought for civil rights in the form of desegregated communities. Many of these efforts reached across racial lines, as white unionists actively boycotted establishments that denied serving blacks. Chicago-style UPWA unionism attempted to dismantle not only the material wage differentials between black and white workers, but also the social wage of white workers, when they extended the struggle into the larger communities. This extension depended on the unique black leadership and sometimes, despite all odds, black-white alliances from the rank-and-filers. As succinctly put by the head of Local 25's grievance committee, Charlie Hayes, "We kept saying that we had to have a union that the people controlled" (UPWAOHP), and this is what the UPWA became in the urban center of Chicago.

The Chicago packinghouses organized under the UPWA reflected the dynamic packinghouse communities in the post-war period, and the strengthening place of black rank-and-filers. Although the discussion above reflects the importance of the UPWA in supporting and gaining from a sort of black consciousness unique to Chicago and post-war industrialization, what pushes the union beyond trade unionism²⁰ or social movement unionism is how the worker-members worked through the UPWA to extend organizing *outside* of the factory. These are spaces where white and black workers joined together through political, religious, community, and civil rights organizations, both formal and informal, in efforts to transform their communities. They rallied over issues of civil rights, hunger, desegregation, housing discrimination, equal education, hiring practices beyond the Big Four plants, and for overall human dignity and respect. The combined efforts of the

¹⁹ *Brown v. Board of Education*, Topeka, Kansas, found *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the "Separate but Equal" ruling to be unjust, ending legislative support of segregation. Although this *de jure* ruling was monumental, battles against *de facto* desegregation continue to be fought.

UPWA drive in Chicago, with a heightened post-war consciousness of an increasing black rank-and-file community, strengthened the labor-civil-rights struggle and constructed Chicago as an important place of struggle.

Place and Community Unionism

My argument for the importance of place here is in two senses. In the first sense, place was essential in community unionism in that workers and members of the packinghouse communities were one and the same. Struggles for civil rights and economic justice knew no divisions of factory and community, of production and social reproduction, but rather, the UPWA understood the necessity of maintaining both. In the second sense, the place of the UPWA's positioning in the urban center of Chicago was key to successful organizing because of the amount of political-economic clout afforded to the UPWA as the site of industry concentration.

The UPWA's strong ties to the community were essential in successful organizing campaigns as black and white religious leaders, the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council (directly south of the packinghouses) and leaders of the Black Belt neighborhood (one mile east of the packinghouses) provided strength to the movement not experienced elsewhere. Southside's Washington Park became geographically essential (physically and socially) to the movement, due to its location between the Black Belt, Packingtown, and Hyde Park (Halpern 1997). Here, as sociologist Horace Cayton noted, "jack-leg preachers joust with curbstome atheists, and Black Zionists break a lance with sundry varieties of Reds" (ibid., 80). Washington Park became the staging ground for eviction and rent control protests led by the "Flying Squadrons," unemployment rallies, and other direct actions

concerning the surrounding communities, which occurred almost daily (UPWAOHP). Yet, it is important not to understand this park as simply a “backdrop” for organizing campaigns, but rather as foundational to bringing community members together. The physical proximity of this gathering space to the packinghouses enabled the organizers of the UPWA to effectively connect to potential worker-members as well as quickly gather community support for existing struggles.

Richard Saunders, a UPWA founder at Armour Soap recalled working to desegregate eateries on 46th and Ashland with the help of Saul Alinsky, a prominent “Back-of-the-Yards” Neighborhood Council member and labor leader (UPWAOHP). Alinsky also played a major role in the 1948 strikes, in mobilizing the Catholic Church, particularly Bishop Sheil who helped rescue the picket lines from raiding police forces (Phil Weightman, UPWAOHP). Religious organizations were influential in bridging the false dichotomy of labor and community. Early desegregation movements even targeted churches, as in the case of Walter Strabawa’s wedding at St. Rose of Agnes Church in the heart of the Polish community. Strabawa worked in the pork pack at Armour and invited black and white workers from his department. When church ushers acted in a discriminatory manner against his black co-workers in attendance, the workers united in protesting the church. Racial justice in the packing community was not only pushed to allow black customers greater access, but also in support of anti-discriminatory practices in all realms of community life.

Members of the UPWA were able to successfully integrate Ashland Avenue, and an important business area in the union stockyards also known as “Whiskey Row.” The importance of integrating this district is not in it’s economic importance for workers, or to

grant black workers any formal sense of “power,” but rather to fight the “wages of whiteness” aforementioned, and open up influential social spaces to the black community. Although bars aren’t explicit bargaining tables, or political institutions key to the Civil Rights Movement, they are important for informal social interaction and comradery for the rank-and-file *after* work. Many of the UPWAOHP interviewees expressed the importance of bars as makeshift union halls. They were also strategically essential in spreading important information and gaining initial support for the union.



[Figure 1]
“Housing Discrimination” by Frank Miller (*The Meat of It*, Fall 1960, Vol. XV. No. 3)

Crucial to the UPWA’s success was a member-led effort to extend public housing to black families. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, through public protests and grassroots community organizing they were successful in getting the Chicago Housing Authority to allow black tenants in the public housing projects in Trumbull Park. Thus, active members of the Chicago UPWA were able to sustain both successful organizing campaigns within the

factory at the same time as, or even *because* of their cross-race mobilizing outside of the factory. Linking up with the Urban League and having members in key positions within the NAACP, black rank-and-filers became leaders in their community organizations. In Chicago, unlike many other places where members were interviewed, these Civil Rights organizations were able to gain the visible support of white workers. They also garnered support from religious leaders, grocery store owners, landlords, and small business owners in order to foster a less segregated, more racially just, working-class community. This truly exemplified a sense of community unionism, one that became extremely meaningful to the rank-and-file members who led and participated in the UPWA.

By the late 1940s, almost the entire industry was organized. Although racial solidarity was established in packinghouse centers like Chicago, it is important to note that white supremacist backlash did exist, especially when black and white workers began pushing for more confrontational, [less easily swallowed] forms of community unionism. Such sentiment is expressed by Swift mechanic Francis Connell, “as far as discrimination is concerned, the union should do all it can within the plant. They should confine it to that. When they talk about discrimination outside, housing etc., that has nothing to do with the union.” (UPWAOHP).

This uneasiness also surfaced in 1949 when the Chicago district office, the international office, was moved to the Black Belt neighborhood at 19th and Wabash (although less than a mile away) from the all-Polish Back-of-the-Yards neighborhood at 48th and Marshfield. A less explicit protection of whiteness (Lipsitz 2011) emerged when whites expressed discomfort with this move, and as noted by Herb March, “Whites were all for the union, but they didn’t feel comfortable going over at night into the black community

for meetings” (UPWAOHP). Even pessimistic Sam Parks was surprised by this uneasiness on the part of white members after the move. He cited the extra police protection because the police station was located next to the new office in the Black Belt that was non-existent at the old office, even as black members made up a majority of the attendees at the old meetings. These examples reflect the precarious position of racial justice labor organizing, and the necessity of a strong, intimately invested group of workers and community members.

Leaders within the movement estimate only 10% of white cadre as being indispensable to black activism (Horowitz 1997). This estimate, despite depressing the importance of sustained cross-race solidarity, signifies the strength in black militancy and race-based consciousness that fueled UPWA success. The UPWA, centering race and class through rank-and-file led direct actions and community development created a favorable work environment, and made several gains for not only packinghouse workers' but also surrounding community members' rights. Yet as UPWA-style organizing in Chicago became more powerful, packers began looking elsewhere as the “class-warfare” began to take its toll. The spatially separate and politically autonomous rural regions of the Midwest and interestingly the low-wage right-to-work states of the Jim Crow South provided attractive destinations for the largest packers. The relocation of these firms became both the effect of successful organizing, and the cause of failed extension efforts of the UPWA, resulting in these race and place-based labor successes to be short-lived.

CHAPTER 2

The Fort Worth Experience

[Table 2]

UPWA- Fort Worth Timeline

1943 Workers at Armour win an NLRB representation election

1948 General Strike

1951 Desegregation Conflict

Disaffiliation of Fort Worth Stockyards

1963 Armour Plant Closes

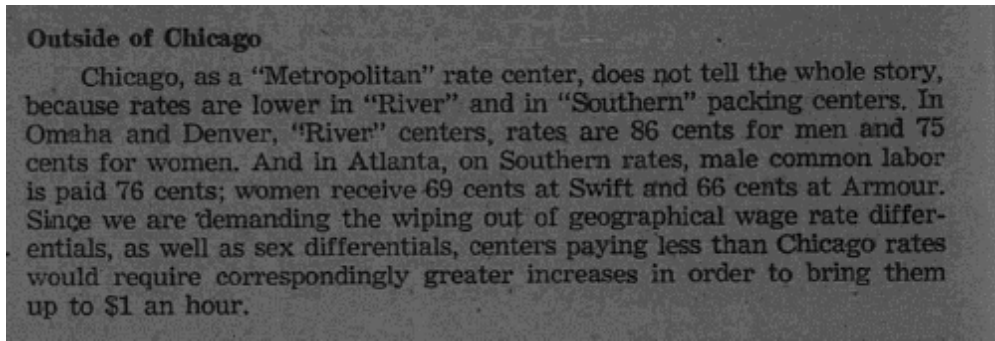
1964 Armour Plant Opens in Arlington, TX

1968 UPWA merges with Amalgamated Meat Cutters

1979 Amalgamated merges with United Food and Commercial Workers

Despite the many gains made in packinghouse centers like Chicago, rural areas in the South and Midwest provided conservative organizing strongholds for the traditional, white-dominated AFL. Many Southern states were established right-to-work states, making it more difficult to unionize plants. Importantly, racial divisions within Southern plants remained major deterrents to UPWA-style organizing. Additionally, there was a long-standing wage differential between Northern and Southern plants, providing a much cheaper workforce [Figure 2]. For example, Fort Worth had an average 9-cent wage differential for male workers, and an additional 4-cent differential for female workers than in Chicago (Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP). Generally wages were lower in Fort Worth for *all* workers, but if departments that were lily-white (like mechanical and sliced bacon) were also the highest-paid or cleanest, black workers, and especially black women workers disproportionately lost out.²¹ For these reasons, Southern plants were extremely attractive to the meatpackers.

²¹ There were attempts to alleviate these differentials on the part of the Locals both in Fort Worth and at the international level through national campaigns that targeted entire companies, rather than local plants.



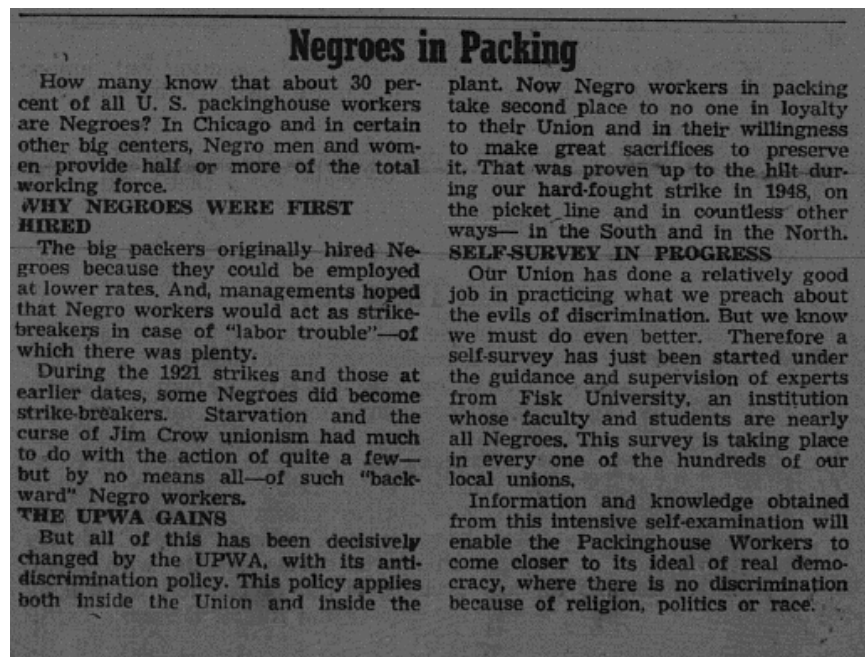
[Figure 2]

"Regional Wage Differentials" (*The Meat of It*, November 1946, Vol. II. No. 7)

Fort Worth packinghouses, at their height in the mid-1940s, employed over 3,000 workers. One-third of these workers were African American, migrating mostly from other parts of the US South, one-half were native-born whites, and several hundred were Spanish speaking Latinos/as from lower Texas, other parts of the Southwest, and Mexico. Similar to the Chicago experience, major cleavages existed along racial lines. Yet these cleavages took on more visible and openly damaging forms in Fort Worth. These divisions emerged during failed organizing drives in 1904, 1921, and 1922 by the AFL backed Amalgamated and were fueled by similar company-black-worker relationships that marked Chicago's early days of organizing, yet in Fort Worth, the surrounding communities' efforts to maintain white privilege remained hostile to true cross-race organizing.

Although Fort Worth was the home of two major meatpacking plants, Armour and Swift & Company, the UPWA was only able to successfully unionize the Armour plant in 1943 after a difficult organizing drive led by loading dock and kill floor workers. Swift remained under the control of a paternalistic company union. Despite organizing the Armour plant, the lily-white stockyards at this plant disaffiliated in the mid-1950s, after battling integration and mounting hostility over the desegregation agreements. White workers often joined the UPWA and were initially supportive of the campaigns, but when

the union began challenging issues of racial discrimination and divisive racialization on the part of the companies, issues that they believed would directly affect their economic interests, white workers would often step down. It was not only the lily-white stockyards who disagreed with the UPWA's anti-discrimination program, as 90% of the white workers in the Fort Worth Local 54 supported the continued use of segregated eating facilities, and 30% continued to object to working in the same job classification (with the same pay) as black workers (Sanders-Cassell 2010).



[Figure 3]
 "Fisk University Self-Survey" (*The Meat of It*, June 1949, Vol. V, No. 1)

This lack of unionization reflected not only the very distinct racial climate that was resistant to the type of community unionism developing in Chicago, but also to Texas' status as a "right-to-work"²² state and the existing strict anti-picketing laws. Workers

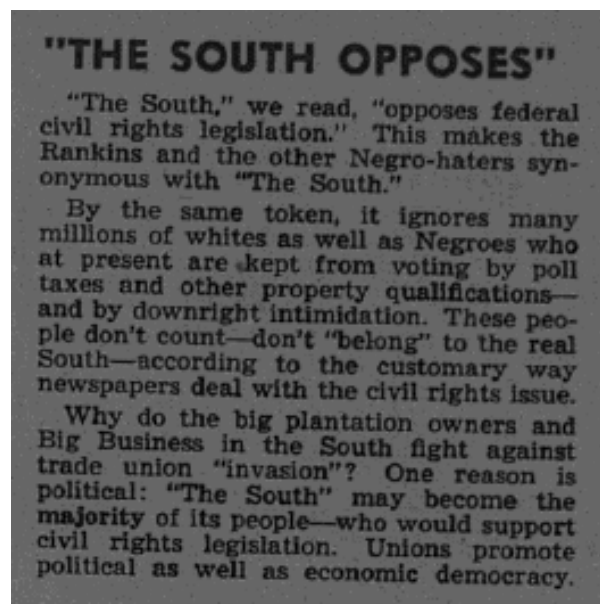
²² "The right to work law, is another damaging law, nothing but a union-busting tactic. The way it sounds, 'you know I got a right to work wherever I want,' but that's not the purpose of it. It's not that. It keeps the union out of the plant, and this can hurt" (Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP).

interviewed were well aware of these laws and their “union busting” purpose. Eddie Humphrey, a steward of Local 54 understood the challenge to unions such laws imposed, “They [the packers] can get a court injunction on you so quick it can make your head spin. Think about what happened here to the machinists, TWA on strike, and they made them go back to work, and that hurts. You can’t win those type of strikes unless you got the support, unless all y’all go out” (UPWAOHP). Even when workers were ready and willing to strike, they often found themselves up against not only the packers but also the local law enforcement and threat of court injunctions.

After the major plants began shuttering in Chicago, and the UPWA moved towards a more concessionary politics with less contentious, more bureaucratized leadership, members of the Fort Worth Local 54 were unable to maintain the struggle. In 1963, the one UPWA-organized plant in Fort Worth closed its doors, following similar shutterings in Chicago. Yet a key difference from the Chicago shutterings is that only one year later, Armour deceptively raised another plant just 15 miles away in Arlington, TX. Because of the declining power of the Chicago locals in District 1, and the disorganized labor in Fort Worth, the legacy of UPWA organizing was unable to hold out. Therefore the situation and history of organizing in Fort Worth, although distinct from that in Chicago, is not entirely separate. The relationship between these two labor geographies was key to resistance struggles within the UPWA both nationally and locally and symptomatic of larger industry-wide processes. Fort Worth, Texas, provides an exemplary case for a “Southern difference,” which made all the difference in extending (or failing to extend) the UPWA’s anti-discriminatory policies and overall sustainability of the union on the national level.

Simultaneously, with the re-opening of an Armour plant, the Fort Worth experience provides evidence to what made the South so attractive to the packers.

“The Southern Difference”



[Figure 4]

“The South Opposes” (*The Meat of It*, Autumn 1957, Vol. XII. No. 3)

This comparison is not of static spaces, to serve as yet another aggrandized view of a liberal urban North juxtaposed to a backward rural South, but rather to illuminate where and when the UPWA was most successful, and what opportunities fostered, as well as what barriers clearly limited, the workers’ success. There are several expressions of successful and transformative organizing within Local 54 in Fort Worth as well as a critical recognition of the continued segregation and discrimination in Chicago [Figure 1]. Still, there existed many obstacles to developing a sort of community unionism in Fort Worth. These may be succinctly attributed to what workers throughout the UPWAOHP have expressed as the “Southern Difference,” having to deal with both differing labor-capital

relations as well as very differing cultural and social relations. Finally, it is necessary to understand the two sites as deeply relational. As plant closings and union mergers with Amalgamated were occurring at the international level support coming from Chicago severely waned.

This declining support, disaffiliation, and disregard for the international-level anti-discrimination program provide expressions of resistance to the Chicago-style organizing in Fort Worth. Thus, the more obvious history of legally supported racism and white supremacy in the form of Jim Crow laws, the Southern distrust of Northern organizing efforts, the unchallenged segregation of communities, the existence of effective anti-labor laws, and finally the relative lack of community support for Civil Rights struggles all contributed to distinct barriers to UPWA-style organizing. What was challenging for the union became very attractive to the packers, providing welcoming sites that would further disorganize the labor struggle in meatpacking.

Civil War Legacy and the Jim Crow South

An interesting “southern difference” that emerged through the UPWAOHP with Fort Worth packinghouse workers, was the lasting effects of the Civil War on many of the white workers’ consciousness. One UPWA stockyard worker and amateur historian, Charlie McCafferty, whose father was extremely active in the union, highlighted the relatively short period of time that had lapsed from the Civil War to the labor struggles in the inter-war and post-WWII period.

To them [people in McCafferty’s generation] the Civil War was not a hundred years ago. It was their granddaddy’s time... They had the feeling of a conquered people. They had a feeling of being oppressed, certainly looked down upon by the rest of the

nation as rednecks or hillbillies that talked funny or moved slow... They had a certain sense of inferiority about it (UPWAOHP).

At most, there were only two generations between Fort Worth packinghouse workers and family members who had fought in or at least experienced the Civil War firsthand. Not only did the Southern defeat begin to dismantle the white racial hierarchy but it also firmly entrenched a sort of North-South division. The history of a “Northern oppression” which embodied both racialized and class-based tensions, created a drastically different organizing climate for the workers within Local 54 attempting to extend the international struggle, especially one that was viewed by many as coming from the North, out of Chicago.

The continued existence of Jim Crow laws (black codes) that sanctioned racial segregation as well as a stringently upheld culture of white supremacy, proved to be tremendous barriers to UPWA organizing and Chicago-driven policy implementation. In reaction to the gains made for racial equality after the Civil War, through the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, Jim Crow laws were implemented to ban blacks from all public facilities, jobs, juries, neighborhoods, and public transportation. The 1896 “separate but equal” outcome of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision legally reinforced these laws, and remained intact until 1954. Black codes were upheld in many parts of the South until the 1960s. The Southern culture from which these laws emerged, forced a racial hierarchy that severely impacted social interaction between blacks and whites. This culture of white supremacy had obvious implications for Chicago-style UPWA organizing which sought to reach across black-white²³ lines. This was a challenge to racial solidarity that ultimately challenged UPWA organizing at its core.

²³ In Fort Worth, Texas, these racialized divisions also extended to the Latino/a population.

The racialized divisions that were disruptive in early labor organizing within Chicago's meatpacking industries *remained* influential throughout the organizing drive of the UPWA in Fort Worth. The lynching of a black strikebreaker during the 1919 general strike had a lasting effect on both black and white meatpacking workers. During this strike, members of the KKK publicly lynched him near the stockyards. Expressions of the lynching surfaced in the oral histories conducted over sixty years later, yet the event was understood and remembered differently by the black and white workers interviewed. McCafferty, a white worker and supporter of the UPWA and civil rights organizing, blames a sort of Northern outsider faction that came in and incited the racist violence. Yet, McCafferty importantly emphasizes the 'Southern difference' that the antagonists were unaware of, a kind of 'Southern mentality' that was emphasized only *after* labor movement organizers moved in.

Not having no understanding of the mentality of the people down here probably led to a lot of political relation blunders, in fact the strike as it occurred with the violence, with the hanging of a black man, or a colored man they called them back then, seizing him and taking him out of the jail, the county jail, and hanging him down there on Daniels [street] (UPWAOHP).

Additionally, the KKK murder served as an expression that the labor movement was synonymous with white supremacy from its inception. This sentiment is clearly expressed further into McCafferty's interview, "*Unionists* pulled a black man from the local jail. A lot of the earlier union members belonged to the KKK. This was a major factor allowing you into the Klan, white, Protestant, supposedly 'Anglo-Saxon,' whatever that's supposed to mean" (UPWAOHP, emphasis added). This incident visibilized the white supremacist attitudes and concretely placed racial division within, if not central to, the labor struggle. Thus, the labor movement preceding the UPWA organizing drives was framed as

simultaneously Northern *and* White, working to dissuade both black and white Southerners.

The culture that the Jim Crow South fostered, which was influential in fueling migrations to places like Chicago, dually worked to dissuade major demographic changes in places like Fort Worth. Even after the war, when the racial compositions in urban centers of the North were drastically transformed, there was little change in places like Fort Worth. This consistency in the number of white workers is expressed in the interview with Frank Wallace, who noticed, “no difference... Majority white. It stayed pretty constant... We probably picked up more percentage of those (Mexican Americans) after the war” (UPWAOHP). The organizing drives in Chicago, which relied heavily on the changing demographics and the strengthening black communities, did not have the same organizing base in Fort Worth.

The unique autonomy of the UPWA allowed locals to implement national-level programs and policies only insofar as they had local membership support. Therefore, as it was difficult to overturn the many “union-busting” laws described above, it was almost impossible to transform segregation practices and normalized white supremacy “from below” as in the case of Chicago. The UPWA in Fort Worth was fighting not only the packers, but due to its civil-rights focus, it was also struggling against a deeply entrenched culture of racism. As growing opposition groups in Local 54 were able to contest the union’s authority and legitimacy in Fort Worth, on the grounds of protecting whiteness, there was little that union-supporters in Fort Worth could do. As Chicago’s power declined, these rump groups were able to counteractively gain power. These problematic divisions for labor simultaneously proved beneficial for capital, encouraging mobility.

Black Consciousness in Fort Worth

Similar to the distinctively race-conscious industrialism black workers developed out of the second great migration in Chicago, black workers in the Fort Worth Local noted a difference in workers in the post-war period, after Local 54 had been firmly established. Frank Wallace's discussion of the grievance procedure and what this meant especially for black workers explains this shift in attitudes and expectations of these workers.

Early 40s, late 30s, not as much as later developed. You had no, well let's put it this way, you were well aware of the fact that you wouldn't gonna get any place asking for a better job or a job that had originally been given to a white. So there weren't any grievances in the early stages of the organizing campaign, after the union had gotten there. We began to get a sense of knowhow as far as processing grievances, then we proceeded to ask for those jobs that in the past had been off limits to us. Which created big fights as you were probably told, and we stood our grounds. I think that that's about the time that we began to recognize that we had a little bit more muscle, a little bit more people power, let's say than when we had had before (UPWAOHP).

Although there was a major backlash to this "people power" which demanded recognition and would not accept the racial segregation of the status quo, the UPWA was still greatly important in mobilizing and supporting black workers who previously felt powerless.

These were workers who "were reluctant even to do what we asked. This was something new. You had to have lived in that period of time to know what a black person had to go through under those segregated and discrimination conditions. A lot was reluctant" (Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP). From Humphrey's recollection, black workers were reluctant not only because of their position as precarious labor, but distinctly because of their racialized experiences which developed out of segregation and discrimination in Jim Crow South.

Because of their social, physical, and political-economic location in the Jim Crow South, many black workers were inhibited from openly expressing a historically informed

racial consciousness. In spite of this, race-consciousness also provided a powerful impetus for mobilization, as Frank Wallace understands, the packers were,

Making money off of it. Not only was you suffering but I was suffering; now I was probably suffering more, but you was suffering too because we could probably both get more... I could see the thing they was doing to us you know. I certainly wasn't being helped by it, but the guy who was enjoying a little bit more; he was always afraid and looking over his shoulder... This is the sort of thing that I pointed out to people, by different means by different people. When I was educated to it, when my eyes were really opened to what was going on, that's the things that I was pointing out when I was a leader (UPWAOHP).

This sort of class-consciousness, unity among workers despite the company's use of wage differentials, developed out of an experience that was specific to black workers. Wallace understands the need for all workers to unite; he understands how all workers are being harmed, are suffering, because of the company's unjust actions. This provided a small, yet important window for UPWA cross-race organizing. Yet when he contrasts his *greater* amount of suffering, in comparison to a white co-worker who did the same exact work for a higher pay, a standpoint emerges that was not expressed among interviews with white workers. This awareness became a powerful rallying point for members of the UPWA, as they fought for national-level wages through company-targeted campaigns.²⁴

Although the standpoint of black workers was essential for early organizing drives, as exemplified above, the cross-race work of the UPWA did prove essential to individual worker-members. Recollections of the 1948 General Strike reflect these gains. Despite "losing" the struggle for a 49 cent wage increase, many leaders of the UPWA did not believe they had lost, but rather benefited from the non-material success of the strike. Eddie

²⁴ The UPWA would target a meatpacker, for example, Armour's, and bargain for wage increases across the board. Rank-and-file representatives from several locals would partake in the negotiations. The UPWA made wage differentials, both across racialized and gendered lines and across geographic locales, a central priority (UPWAOHP, *The Meat of It*).

Humphrey argued that the strike brought black and white workers closer together in that they were working for a “common cause.” When contrasting his experiences during the Strike to those after, he fondly laughs at the change in attitude of many white workers.

Man I seen some white people down there that, heck, I knew they’d look at you, and I call it the hate stare, you see a white person look at a black, and say ‘oooh, he’s just gonna go through you.’ But (laughs) these kind of things just went away. When you’re used to these kind of things you can see it. You just have to live it. You have to live in those kind of conditions to know what really went on. Yes I think that strike brought about a harmony between blacks and whites that never would have been if it had not happened (UPWAOHP).

From Humphrey’s experiences, it is clear that to argue for the importance of race-based organizing, originating from this emerging black consciousness, is not to argue against black-white unity, but rather to recognize the transformative power this type of organizing can have even in places like the Jim Crow South of Fort Worth.

As in the Chicago case, UPWA organizing in Fort Worth fostered black leadership. George Thomas, a black rank-and-file worker on the loading docks became a key figure in building support between both black and white workers. He later was elected as District president, leading several successful negotiating drives with Armour in Chicago. Thomas also became the first black leader at a Southern local, something “you just didn’t find that very often in the deep South” (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP). Despite the fairly even representation of black and white workers, Thomas successfully gained an estimated support of about 90% of white workers. Black supporters of Thomas, recalled fondly, “They just couldn’t believe that a black person in the South could do the things that George did.” (Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP).

Local 54 was able to elect Thomas over the known segregationist, A.J. Pittman. When Thomas bid for chief steward over Local 54, Humphrey clearly recalled Pittman’s

reaction. “‘It’s not time for a black man to be a chief steward over the Armour plant here.’ He did it publicly. This was in a meeting, I never will forget it, ‘how in the hell, you’re crazy.’ I said, ‘you’re really crazy, I don’t agree with you in no kind of way’” (UPWAOHP). Thus Thomas’ election provided a huge victory that signified the UPWA’s reach beyond Chicago in support of black workers in Fort Worth despite racial antagonism coming from both the packers and white segregationists.

Thomas did not merely serve as a token representative of black-white racial solidarity, but actively fought for a desegregation agreement at the International level, which was eventually enforced at the Fort Worth Local. He pushed for the removal of “white-only” and “negro-only” signs, segregated locker rooms and cafeterias, and the material wage differentials based on race and gender. To many of the workers interviewed, representative leadership was attributed to workers’ experience as rank-and-file workers, as noted by L.C. Williams, “between ‘56-‘59, most of those people who held leadership positions back there was just working in the plant, they wasn’t holding any position any more” (UPWAOHP). George Thomas stood out in the workers’ memories as a leader who really represented the UPWA struggle and would not forget about the communities “from whence [he] came” (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP). He inspired many of them to demand their civil rights. L.C. Williams’s recollection is notable, as Thomas encouraged him to join the Union because, “Hell, you need to stand for it or stand against it, one or the other. If you’re not willing to stand up and support it, get off the fence” (UPWAOHP).

While the Civil War had lasting effects on white workers in the Fort Worth UPWA, black workers more readily cited their experiences in WWII as key in influencing how they

positioned themselves within the packinghouses. Eddie Humphrey clearly articulates the tension he personally felt after fighting for the US against Nazism and returning to a country where he was still racially discriminated against.

Even though I love this country, I've always respected it, I learnt something also. Being in that type of a war, and when I came back, and what we were fighting for, to rid the country of Nazism and Communism, I just couldn't see myself being segregated and discriminated against, the way we were. There was some improvement when I came back, but you could cut it with a knife back in those days because that was just the law (UPWAOHP).

The 'Northern oppression' felt by white workers after the Civil War often dissuaded them from joining a union they saw as coming mostly from Yankee liberals in Chicago. Whereas, for many black workers, their experiences in WWII and the discrimination they felt when returning home, only increased their allegiance to the union.

Frank Wallace recalls the difference the UPWA's civil rights orientation made for him, as he "couldn't cope with that kind of situation" that the "old time negroes" were going with (UPWAOHP). For Wallace, and many other black workers nationally, this is what was so attractive about the UPWA. Again Humphrey is illustrative here, highlighting the strength the union gave him after returning from WWII.

That's why I became so close with the union, even today; I'm just an old fight horse. When the bell ring, I'm ready to jump to the cause. We eliminated those barriers and we still have them, and I won't get ahead of myself, but that was my feeling, and when I came out of the service in '46 I still pursued it. Not only that, from a political, even back doing Martin Luther King, I was one of those, participated in the marches, sit-ins, live-ins, whatever you wanna call them, I was a part of helpin' to eliminate this kind of living condition for black people. I'm doing that this today (UPWAOH).

The union, for workers like Humphrey, wasn't just about wages and working conditions; it wasn't just about bargaining agreements and paid overtime; it was about transforming the

“living condition for black people.” This proved monumental for black workers in the South.

Yet without the larger support of the community, black, white, and Mexican alike, UPWA supporters in Local 54 were less successful at fully embracing the struggles of the Chicago district. The established history of racial segregation, overt racism, and anti-union laws in the Fort Worth area provided real barriers to extending the Chicago-style struggles of the UPWA. Once the plants in the Chicago center began relocating, and as political power waned, the progressive push of Chicago also began to wane. After the UPWA merged with Amalgamated and began making more concessionary agreements, Local 54’s battle for race-based labor organizing received even less support. Struggles in the Fort Worth Armour plant were not sustained after the 1963 relocation, and even after Armour’s nearby reopening just a few months later, the union could not regain its post-war strength.

Protection of Whiteness

“Not so much that they were so dominant here [Fort Worth], but blacks and the minorities were becoming dominant in the other locals and they weren’t gonna tolerate it. That’s it, so there was pressure coming on down here, to follow in line what the rest of the locals are doing throughout the nation” (Charles McCafferty, UPWAOHP).

Predominantly white locals in the rural South and Midwest, conveniently right-to-work states like Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, and Iowa, remained major obstacles to extending UPWA anti-discrimination policies and Civil Rights activism, preferring, in Lipsitz’s (2011) terms, “a possessive investment in whiteness” over true racial-solidarity. Many white workers and management viewed the union as a sort of top-down, northern driven establishment with anti-discrimination policies that the South was not ready for. The interview conducted with Armour assistant plant superintendent, Kenneth Neidholdt, is

particularly telling. Neidholdt provides perspective on company representatives' relations with the union and the active organizers.

There wasn't no stronghold for the union, no. The Af of L dropped out altogether. Then the CIO, when they went down, I know a good many good white people, I mean they were intelligent and everything. There wasn't no time. They went down there and then I'd say within two years time, you could talk to one, 'oh I don't know I haven't been down there.' You know, you'd say, 'John, what's going on down there?' 'I dunno, I haven't been down there. Just a bunch of... (*long deliberate pause*²⁵) and they'd call them, 'a bunch of colored people down there, Mexicans.' Except the top men, from up yonder. They had a union, Ed Mann, he's white, he had a assistant, he's white, they had people come down here, he's white. But the presidents here, locally, all, well most of them, not all of them, let me say they got a few radicals on there as stewards but they didn't get any of the logical, good thinking (*white*) people. They belonged to the union, but they weren't active. They belonged to the union, they didn't have any choice" (emphasis added, UPWAOHP).

The union, according to Niedholdt, was entirely pushed from "Yankees" out of Chicago with local black leadership who did not engage with white workers, other than the occasional "radical," while the "good thinking" local boys refused to associate with the UPWA. What was most dangerous is that this valuation of perspective on the union was not solely isolated to management.

The distrust of the UPWA by many Fort Worth workers emanated from a distrust of the "liberal North" and the progressive civil rights, although sometimes masked as "communist," agenda that threatened the benefits of "whiteness" or what Roediger has termed, the "wages of whiteness" (1991). This sentiment is visible in the plant's reaction to the desegregation agreements and the formation of rump groups led most notably by A.J. Pittman and 'Moon' Mullins inside the plant, and Lee Holly in the stockyards. Frank

²⁵ This interview was extremely frustrating to listen to, yet illuminating for Niedholdt's candidness with the interviewers. The pause here is quite long, and illustrative. It sounds as if Niedholdt is refraining from using a derogatory term here.

Wallace's description of 'Moon' Mullins' leadership role and white supremacy at the time was unique to, yet illustrative of, the Fort Worth experience.

He was just a racist, who knew that there were other racists there. All they needed was someone to get up on top of the soapbox and begin to march in front of them, so he picked up a few followers after he got ambitious suddenly. This caused holy chaos as far as our union was concerned. Without a whole lot of fighting, without a whole lot of effort it would have torn this local completely a part. There were people who said no this would never ever happen as long as they were alive, they made these kind of statements in the opening meetings. There were a few times that there were disruptive meetings that they almost had to be disjoined because there were disruptive people trying to raise some hell. There was some fear of people getting hurt over this kind of thing. It's fortunate that nobody got killed because I think that Mullins and this other fellow from the yards, I think that that would have been one of the things that they would have hoped would happen, that somebody would have gotten killed because of that situation. Because the hate was really there. Racism, was there like it had never been before (UPWAOHP).

Although these obstacles weren't always explicitly visible as in Fort Worth's calls for re-segregation, union hall clashes over George Thomas's ascendancy, and the disaffiliation of the lily-white stockyards, black workers interviewed through the Wisconsin Historical Society's Oral History Project expressed a definite division between their efforts and the efforts of most of their white co-workers. Frank Wallace, a black UPWA worker-member of the Fort Worth, Texas Swift and Company plant cogently describes race relations in the 1950s as being worse than earlier periods, stating,

The only reason I said it was worse at that time is because here at this time we were doing something *about* segregation, when I was younger or when I first went to the plant, there was nothing being done to break down the barriers or anything of that sort which didn't cause anybody to be upset... We can say that they had something to shout about at that time (UPWAOHP).

As Wallace experienced, it was only when UPWA organizing began to firmly take place did long-standing and normalized racism become visible. Charlie McCafferty also observed similar barriers to UPWA organizing. White members would give "lip service to equality," while "still keepin' the minorities out although the companies were hiring them"

(UPWAOHP). District president A. J. Pittman led this project, and was determined to keep black workers out of the higher paying meat cutting or boning departments, the stockyards, the mechanical department, and black women out of sliced bacon.

Racial tension especially came to light during the 1948 General Strike. This was an industry-wide national strike initiated by the UPWA, meant to hit Armour, Swift & Company, and Cudahy companies simultaneously. Although memories of cross-race solidarity were expressed in interviews with Chicago UPWA members, a different memory surfaced among Fort Worth workers. Frank Wallace reflected on the strike as used by antagonistic white leaders as a way to reinstate a lily-white plant. “The way I get it, it was a time, when some whites were saying, ‘this was a time when we will be able to get rid of all the N-I-G-G-E-R-S (spelled out).’ So they did what they could to help with the bringing the strikebreakers in” (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP). It is after black workers begin pushing for true racial, and thus economic, justice that the protection of white privilege becomes increasingly necessary, and existing racism is made most explicit.

Even after black-led, race-conscious worker organizing had developed in Local 54, there remained entrenched barriers to developing a sort of ‘community unionism’ that would reach into the surrounding communities. Despite having a majority of white support for George Thomas, and even building cross-race coalitions to desegregate the packinghouses, black-white coalitions did not extend beyond these walls. A striking difference was Local 54 lack of participation in neighborhood councils, the NAACP, or with religious institutions. Eddie Humphrey sheds some light onto why this type of organizing was so difficult,

There were a few packinghouse members at that time. To go back to the old days, most of the whites that were members of the local NAACP did not want to be known.

They just didn't want to be associated with that type of group of people, because, excuse the expression, this was a 'nigger organization' and I don't want to be associated with it, even though they were supporters financially, but they refused to let you use their names" (UPWAOHP).

This sentiment among white workers is illustrative of what Historian Robin D. G. Kelley calls the "hidden transcript" of white workers (1998). This transcript was upheld even by white radicals, in that a "possessive investment" in the "protection of whiteness" (Lipsitz 2011) disallowed white workers who were *willingly* sympathetic to the struggles around racial justice, to be *openly* sympathetic, to accept ostracism and even violence if they were to respect their fellow black workers or to become comrades in a visibly meaningful way. Horowitz argues that, "many Southern white workers had gone along with the union's anti-discrimination program only so long as it didn't affect social relations between blacks and whites" (1997: 112).

There existed fatal consequences if white workers were identified as "nigger lovers" especially in places as contested as the US South²⁶. Even whites who were strong members of Local 54 were much more sympathetic to segregationist leaders like Pittman. Charlie McCafferty, someone who clearly supported the union and distrusted District Director A. J. Pittman, still was sympathetic towards his actions.

I don't knock him [A.J. Pittman] about his cautiousness there. This was Texas... pretty segregated at that time. Although I can understand at that time, I wasn't in agreement with him, my father, everybody, said, 'Let's do this thing in increments.' Which was a white man's way of doing them, but there was a lot of reasons why they should be doing it that way. I know the blacks kept saying, 'well you do this you do that.' Well we could have had a hell of a white-black, we did, but we would have had a hell of a lot at that day and time without the federal government's assistance which

²⁶ This fear also arose in Chicago, where Communist Party leader Herb March discussed the fear of white workers becoming viewed as "nigger lovers." Yet in places like Chicago, civil rights organizing from the UPWA received support from much broader communities. Although this fear was noted, white leaders on the left like Herb March and Saul Alinsky, as well as white rank-and-file members, had enough support to keep from being completely ostracized.

they had in Selma Alabama, which Martin Luther King had some federal support. Down here you wouldn't have had no government support, there wouldn't have been no federal troops to protect you. You'd a been here sons of guns blow your head off of you, 'well somebody shot him.' A very dangerous situation really" (UPWAOHP).

"This was Texas," served as an explanation that legitimated Pittman's actions to maintain segregation. Even seemingly "radical" white cadre, like McCafferty's stockyards worker father, thought the best plan of action would be to take things slowly. This "rational" approach was often contrasted with the "irrational" desires of black workers in pushing change immediately, which for McCafferty and other white workers, was too much too fast. Beyond discussions of what was rational or irrational, there also existed a real fear of the threat of physical violence, even death, if workers in Fort Worth pushed the Civil Rights policies of the UPWA too quickly.

Resistance to antidiscrimination and desegregation agreements in 1952 illustrates the latent violence and distrust among white and black workers that did not emerge in post-war Chicago organizing efforts. One incident, concerning a white supremacist Jack Lamont, almost broke the local apart. Lamont was described by one worker as "one of the most racist people I believe I ever came in contact with... He was one of those type of persons, that he practiced white supremacy, he was telling people he didn't believe in whites mingling with blacks and all of this bull" (Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP). Humphrey had a personal run-in with Lamont and almost "did him in with a hook!" on the shop floor because Lamont told him, "the niggers are trying to take over the union" (ibid.). Humphrey represented a resistant group of black workers who were "just outta the army and weren't gonna hear that bull" (ibid.). Lamont was building up support of white workers to fight the desegregation agreement and reinstate segregated locker rooms and cafeterias. When

members of the local wanted to expel Lamont from the union for his behavior, he had hundreds of workers by his side justifying his racism. Humphrey remembers this incident well, “we had about 2,000 people down there with weapons, I got my pistol in my pocket, everybody was ready to go to war” (ibid.). The conflict was pacified after Humphrey revealed that Lamont was married to and had children by a Mexican woman.

“The only thing they knew was that Communists and niggers were coming in to take their jobs”

--Charlie McCafferty, UPWAOHP

Beyond using white supremacist tactics in response to the UPWA’s civil rights gains, rump group leaders would also use the threat of communism as a way to dissuade black leadership and UPWA support. This scare tactic came out of the post-war era of McCarthyism. Although many of the UPWA organizers had fought in WWII, and struggled to delineate themselves as patriotic supporters of the US government, rump leaders like Mullins and Pittman used the “red scare” to discourage union organizing. Additionally, after the publication of *The Road Ahead*²⁷ (1952) that was seen as coming from the “Chicago based bunch” (McCafferty, UPWAOHP), workers who were even remotely fearful of Communism delinked from the movement. McCafferty’s astute observations of the rump meetings provide clarification.

So when you wave the flag of Communism, most of them didn’t know what the hell that meant, had no understanding of it except that the US was in confrontation, Cold War, with soviet Russia. Most of them probably didn’t even know what a Russian ever looked like. They probably thought he was some Mongolian running around. Lot of people that way, just wasn’t these people. Lot of people talk about being a communist, whole things communist, and didn’t have a damn thing to do with

²⁷ “It wasn’t the big question of the communist scare, it was the question of race relations that he wasn’t about to come involved in. It seemed that we were about to acquire, and that was something I believe he just didn’t want. The most appropriate thing for him to use in the area at that time was the Communist issue. Some of the things that were goin’ on in Chicago didn’t help, but it helped his case” (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP).

communism. And these people would play on the fears. I know what A.J. did, I know exactly what he did. Organizers would go to these meetings and say, 'Boys we got Communists, anti-American guys infiltrating.' It was a small McCarthy type thing, 'we know they're there, we can't prove it but we know they're there. And they're trying to do this, and this is what they're gonna do, the first thing you're gonna have a big black buck nigger, sitting up here working side by side, next thing you know your daughter's gonna be going with him.' Let me tell you what, very damn effective (UPWAOHP).

Yet, this "red scare" differed in its racialized framing as for workers in Fort Worth. When A.J. Pittman was running against George Thomas for district director, he clearly used an odd conflation of anti-Communism with anti-desegregation in support of his election. L.C. Williams explains Pittman's tactic, "he was trying to convince the board members and the delegates that the South just wasn't ready for a Negro director and all this. That people was goin' to suffer from it you know... this would be looked upon as 'commudism' or whatever you want, I don't know what that really means, but all this was thrown into the picture that people just wouldn't stand for this" (ibid.). Communism, or "commudism," as Williams put it, was less meaningfully significant than issues around civil rights, particularly desegregation. Put simply, what developed as the 'red scare' in the urban North, was translated by Racist Opposition into a 'black scare' in Fort Worth.

Because there was no real "leftist" presence in the plant, Pittman was able to co-opt an unfamiliar threat of communism and successfully use Chicago as a "whipping boy," as Frank Wallace puts it, to "disrupt, and say politically kill those individuals whom he felt like were his enemies, by doing the kind of things that he did and stating the kind of things that he did about the whole business of the communist program" (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP). Although all of the black workers who were interviewed were able to see past this masking of white supremacy under the guise of anti-Communism, Pittman and his followers were able to create real turmoil for the UPWA.

The ability for Pittman to manipulate the Red Scare to his advantage also reflects on a sort of “Southern difference” in contrast to the North. Again, Frank Wallace is insightful here, “There’s a difference between those of us who live here and those who live up north and in the east as far as the whole word of communism is concerned, especially back there then. What the hell? We didn’t know nothing about no communism” (UPWAOHP).

Although many workers expressed a lack of understanding of what the “Red Scare” or threat of “comudism” actually meant, leaders like Pittman were able to use this acknowledgement to their advantage. The “Red Scare” was also conflated with intellectualism of the North as coming from, “ideological types,” who had “no real relationship to the economics of the United States to begin with” (Charles McCafferty, UPWAOHP). This again highlights the insulation of a “Southern Difference,” that stood staunchly against the sort of middle-class intellectualism emanating from the North.

Pittman’s ability to manipulate the Red Scare into a “Black Scare” gave pro-segregationists justification for leaving the union. Long-standing members of the union, those who had been there since its inception, began disaffiliating after the 1952 antidiscrimination agreement. These increased conflation of racial and political tensions developed into actual physical confrontations as workers recalled covering up physical and ideological fights among workers so that they would not get fired. These were fights among, “people who had previously been friends, or so called friends, working buddies, it caused a lot of turmoil” (Charles McCafferty, UPWAOHP).

The ‘Southern difference’ created a constrained environment that contrasted greatly from the experience of UWPA organizing in Chicago. Because, “this was Texas and you just didn’t jack with it. You try to do small things. Where they might be desegregating the

whole plant in Chicago, down here they desegregated the cafeteria, or the vending machines” (McCafferty, UPWAOHP). Thus top-down District 1 anti-discrimination policies were not evenly enacted or supported in places where a collective investment in a white working class identity was supported within the plants bolstered by the Southern culture existing in Fort Worth.

Absence of Place and Community Unionsim

*“We never had too bad of a race relations in the plant, now we may raise hell after we get out
you know”*

--Eddie Humphrey, UPWAOHP

The conflicts emerging out of the strengthening black consciousness of UPWA workers and the backlash protective whiteness created an extremely difficult environment for extending UPWA-style community unionism to Fort Worth. Because the surrounding communities maintained rigid segregation through strictly enforced black codes, packinghouses were often the only place where blacks and whites interacted. Unlike the Back-of-Yards neighborhood, the Black Belt, and Packingtown, Fort Worth housing neighborhoods were spatially distant from each other and from the packinghouses. The majority of white workers lived in the Northside area of the city, and other workers were “scattered all over. Some from quite distance.” (Frank Wallace, UPWAOHP). This spatial segregation greatly prohibited organizing efforts beyond the factory. Again, Frank Wallace is insightful here,

Well, when you say in the community, I couldn’t answer that. I’ll tell you why, because the community in the immediate area, was of such that immediate to the south of the plant were predominantly Mexicans, to the northwest there were blacks on the immediate northwest. On the immediate west were whites living separately in segregated housing. It didn’t help, what we did in the plant didn’t help as far as the local community is concerned. Right immediate from the plant, the

stockyards, which had segregated facilities, I don't believe any of the restaurants in that immediate stockyards area took down any signs or partitions (UPWAOHP).

Although it is important to acknowledge the existence of Northern segregation, the unique-to-the-South Jim Crow black codes remained prominent barriers to UPWA organizing.

Most of the white workers were very recently farmers with "rural roots" commuting into the packinghouses. According to McCafferty, these were places where people would not have social interaction for days at a time, and social outlets very limited.²⁸ Being "from the land" this new group of proletarianized white men (and increasingly women) were notably conservative. McCafferty again is useful here,

They came from that conservative, it's a normal thing, if anybody works off the land, you get conservative for a lot of reasons, it has nothing to do with your politics. They came out of a poor poverty stricken state. And they came here, first time ever had a decent job. And any kind of economic standing in a community. Being conservative by the very nature of their life. They were conservative, they wouldn't consider themselves conservative, they wouldn't say to you, 'I'm a conservative,' because they didn't think of themselves as that. Probably a lot of them call themselves liberal. They were conservative because of the nature of their upbringing. And again we go back to the Civil War, especially in the rural areas, that wash over of racism, of inferiority, of the pushing down of the white man by his own white brothers, the contempt that he's held into even by other urban Texans or people.

Thus, a lack of community unionism emerged through distinctly Southern, interlocking cultural and economic conditions. White (and black) workers coming from impoverished conditions of the rural South became dependent on the packing companies, fostering conservative economic and political views. Dependency on the packinghouses developed making it difficult to organize as, "there were no place else to go and no place else they wanted to go because this was their livelihood and the only thing they knew about" (Frank

²⁸ "I'm talking about rural areas. I'm talking about out there where you can see a head for three days at a time, you get to go through town, a little tank town in Texas, Texas has some horrible tank towns, once a month to see the picture show..." (Charlie McCafferty, UPWAOHP).

Wallace, UPWAOHP). This relationship to the packinghouses was similar to newly arrived blacks in Chicago, who became scabs for their employers during the first Great Migration. Yet, the racialized difference becomes apparent through capital's ability to maintain this dependency in the South, conflating the political and economic for white workers opposed to the UPWA's organizing strategies.

Even if workers made strides inside the factories, the composition of the surrounding communities remained strongholds for white supremacy trumping any gains for racial justice that were fostered by the UPWA. Frank Wallace also notes this contrast.

We didn't have segregated picket lines, but we had segregate everything else. We had segregated cafeteria; we had segregated restaurants; we had the 'black' 'white' signs over the water fountains. After negotiations, as you've probably been told, after those things were taken down, we had all kinds of hell... The union hall was integrated. But, as happens in this area, back then, there were people who would group themselves together, such as all whites would come in and sit in one place, this might be true with all the Mexican people, this might be true with some of the blacks. Eventually, it started developing where they start mixing. But this is not until after we had all kind of problems (ibid.).

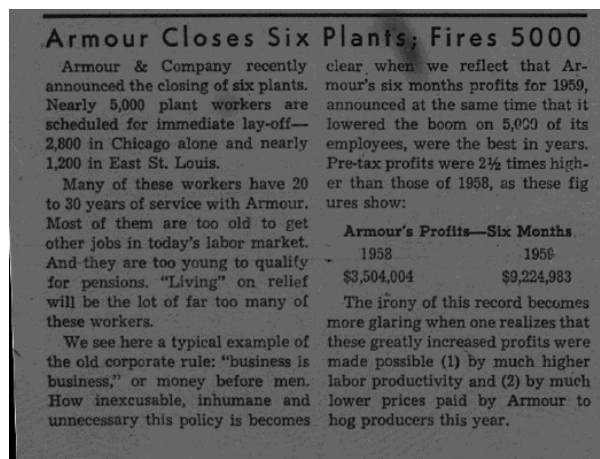
Rather than strengthening both black and white workers through a unique focus on Civil Rights issues, as in the case of Chicago, the UPWA for workers in Fort Worth was unable to reach across deeply racialized divisions. This was not because of a lack of effort on the part of black organizers, as workers discussed above recalled the many physical confrontations as well as union-hall discussions lasting deep into the night over UPWA policies.

Finally, the UPWA in Fort Worth was unable to connect with established Civil Rights organizations like the NAACP or the Urban League. Thus the efforts of the UPWA remained within the plants. Frank Wallace's interview is telling here, "I would say it basically was all inside the plant. I don't remember any involvement as far as the community was concerned" (UPWAOHP). Even if individual members of the UPWA in Fort Worth worked

with Civil Rights organizations like the NAACP or the Urban League, there was no Local union-level recognition. Without union-support, black workers in Fort Worth weren't given the same opportunities to transform the middle-class Civil Rights organizations that did exist, inhibiting an essential solidarity of labor and the Civil Rights movement.

CHAPTER 3

"New Breed" of Packers: "New Breed" of the UPWA



[Figure 5]

"Armour Closings" (*The Meat of It*, Summer 1959, Vol. XIV. No. 3)

Beginning in the 1950s, plants began shuttering in Chicago, either closing entirely or relocating to modernized facilities in rural Midwestern and Southern sites. Swift & Co. was the first to make this move, eliminating its killing operations in 1953. Wilson & Co. followed suit, halting killing in 1955 and closing the entire plant in 1957. Armour left the Union Stock Yards in 1959. In Chicago, these shutterings were disproportionately devastating for black communities, as, by this time, 75% of Chicago packinghouse employees were black.

Following the trajectory of the shutterings, worker interviews reflect a sort of decline in militancy and use of confrontational tactics at the local level. Sam Parks makes this assertion when comparing his union career in comparison to more complicit blacks, "If I hadn't been super militant, I'd have been on the staff. If I'd have grinned, bowed, I'd have been on the staff. I didn't. If you subdued your militancy and conformed, then you stayed. But if you didn't, you had to go" (UPWAOHP). With relocation, came disorganization of

labor in a formal sense, but also a disorganization of militant organizing knowledges. Transfer agreements were weak, in that in most cases, if workers transferred their seniority status over new hires would not carry over with them. A few opted to participate in the re-training programs in cosmetology for women or plumbing for men, but these were considered inadequate by all who participated in them (UPWAOHP). Most workers did not want to simply pack up and leave the lives they had established without the promise of the same positions and status within the plant. Therefore, very few stewards and active members ever chose to relocate with firms. This was, as Humphrey puts it,

to keep the old people from going out there because they knew they were going to be union people. I understand what their purpose were. We raised so much hell, there again I think the international union gave us a pretty crappy deal, for the simple fact that there was so much problems here in Texas at that time, they were ready to just let us go it on our own... (UPWAOHP).

Humphrey connected plant shutterings and a decline in direct action militancy to the 1968 UPWA merger with Amalgamated. This is the same union that the workers of the UPWA had organized against both ideologically (as they were seen as a “white man’s union”) and materially (take for example the 1948 general strike, where Amalgamated actually conceded to industry wage increases that were much less than the UPWA demanded, and this was behind the backs of the UPWA).

I said, ‘what in the hell is going on here?’ It’s the Amalgamated people cutter people. I said, ‘shiiiiit. That just don’t jive.’ These kind of things, we were faced with man, I’m telling you, we started to get new people in Chicago, and the next thing I knew George was still hanging in there but he was getting criticized all kind of ways. Ralph was on his case. I said, ‘hell somewhere down the line, I’m gonna have to leave this thing’... And that’s what I went out on. And like I said I worked forty years, and I left over a 12 dollar an hour job. And I left it. About 3 months after I left they announced that it was closing up (ibid.).

As UPWA power in Chicago declined, the UPWA began shifting their focus towards building cross-industry ties to farmers and new rural workers while moving away from

less popular mobilizations around racial justice. This disorganization of the industry occurred at a crucial time period when Civil Rights organizing began mobilizing nationally. Economic justice began to trump racial justice, not simply because economic concerns became more important or racial segregation was on the decline, but part and parcel to the relocation of the industry.



[Figure 6]
“Factory in the Field” (*The Meat of It*, Summer 1964, Vol. XIX)

It was no coincidence that rural moves by packinghouse plants, beginning in the 1960s and consolidating up until the 1990s, were forming a “new-breed” of packers with a whiter, less militant workforce in the rural Midwest and the historically Jim Crow South. Although the moves were often legitimated as toward milder climates, feed grain and water supplies, or lack of environmental regulation, these were also deliberate moves away from black militancy, organized labor, and the communities they created in the urban center of Chicago. These “factories in the field” [Figure 3] were now to meet or fuel the increasing

consumer demands through a newly proletarianized, non-unionized, spatially dispersed, white workforce.

Which Way Forward?

The paradox—and a fearful paradox it is—is that the American Negro can have no future anywhere, on any continent, as long as he is unwilling to accept his past. To accept one's past—one's history—is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought.

--James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Not only is meatpacking in the US currently dependent on new forms of racialized labor, the ruralization of the industry left thousands of African Americans unemployed, favoring communities once again with a more precarious relationship with labor organizing. Despite these moves to more spatially spread anti-union environment, strikes in these new rural spaces began in the late 1970s and early 1980s as meatpacking wages fell below the US manufacturing average for the first time. In response, plants like Iowa Beef Processors, Inc. (IBP, now Tyson-owned) and Morrell began busing in Mexican workers from the southwest, Southeast Asian workers from California, and surrounding American Indian populations. These tactics appear eerily too familiar, as a tried-and-true tactic for disorganizing labor. Even as marginal workers were actively recruited, from the west coast and beyond the US, most workers commuted from larger cities miles away from the rural plants, disallowing any sort of community or neighborhood-based alliances as evident in the Southside neighborhoods so influential in UPWA organizing (Fink 1998, Bacon 2008).

Because many new workforces are not only divided along racialized lines, but also by language, citizenship, and gender, shop floor organizing became more easily quelled.

These, among other social and spatial barriers²⁹ to communication and solidarity building have advantaged industry consolidation at the expense of workers' rights. Today, less than half the packinghouse workers are under union contracts. Thus, the spatial landscapes of this “new breed” of meatpackers is strategic by controlling or taming workforces and workplaces at society’s margins, “invisibilized” workers and “invisibilized” landscapes sheltering consumers from “the most unsavory aspects of industrialized meat production” (Gouveia and Justka 2002, 371; Pachirat 2011).

HB56, “attacks every aspect of an illegal alien’s life” and “is designed to make it difficult for them to live here so they will deport themselves.”
-Mickey Hammon, (House Representative, AL)

Although the power of the “Big Three” may appear to paint a bleak and hopeless picture, strength can be found in resistance movements by the working-class, by the undocumented, by communities of color, as evident in the history of mobilizing and direct action of the UPWA. The dangerous markings and otherings constructed through racialization by capital are not fixed, and can even be transformative. Rather it is important to understand race as “an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi and Winant 1994, 123). Yet race-based organizing ignorant of a sense of place, of community, of the importance of social reproduction is limited, as evident in this analysis of the UPWA’s history. To sustain working-class struggles, unions and workers’ centers must make connections to workers’ lives beyond the factories, while directly engaging with situated histories of racialized, gendered, and class conflict. Therefore, the racialization of labor that has facilitated capital

²⁹ “Thus factory work gathers men and women together, educates them in a common experience, and educates them to the possibilities of cooperation and collective action. Casual laborers or petty entrepreneurs, by contrast, are dispersed by their occupations, and are therefore less likely to perceive their commonalities of position, and less likely to join together in collective action” (Piven and Cloward 1971, 21).

accumulation may be mobilized to counteract, resist, and revolt against these divisive tactics, becoming particularly meaningful when approaches actively visibilize not only labor, but race and place-based knowledges along the way.

These sorts of informed tactics, which are notably influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, are being taken up by groups that have learned or are learning from the successes and failures of the UPWA. Union struggles experience organizing cycles as capital counter-mobilizes, as in this meatpacking case. But they also make secular gains from these experiences. Thus, the Mississippi Poultry Workers' Center (MPOWER) through a worker-led Leadership Council is tying "local experiences to global processes" (Steusse 2009, 105). MPOWER is able to make these connections through the use of Power and Oppression workshops in order to form cross-race coalitions towards struggles for collaborative futures. Organizations like MIRA (Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance) are actively mobilizing poultry workers through attention to wage-violations but also to "detention matters, racial / ethnic profiling and discrimination, and language barriers in access to the legal system, health care, and education" (www.yourmira.org). Thus forming these groups are coalitions within factories but also outside, as attention is paid to communities' social and not just their labor reproduction.

The Center for New Community out of Chicago is working to connect seemingly disparate workers and places by establishing a Health Action Center in rural Missouri for low-wage packinghouse workers. They have also created the Midwest Immigrant Health Project connecting 6,000 (majority meatpacking) workers across three states. Through 'The Which Way Forward Initiative' the group is "educating and mobilizing African Americans around anti-immigrant attacks that directly affect their communities"

(www.newcomm.org). To understand racialized geographies, as these organizations are doing, is not to defect to divisive identity politics³⁰, but rather to understand the very disparate lived experiences of the heterogeneity of actors, while also seeing where these geographies may intersect, may form coalitions, and may fight similar oppressions towards more democratic forms of work and the creation of more socially just communities.

Although the historicized analysis I present here may appear to paint a bleak picture, that of the UPWA's unsuccessful attempts to organize across places, "failing" to extend the cross-race coalitions that developed in Chicago, and ultimately losing to capital's disorganizing power vis-à-vis rural and Southern relocation, this is not the point. Rather than bemoaning the obstacles exhibited in the Fort Worth experience, or glorifying the conditions built in Chicago, I hope to instead, illuminate the ways in which both successes and failures were closely entwined. Both the place of capital mobility and harbored racial divisions as well as the place of the UPWA community unionism and strength for the labor-Civil Rights movement were co-constructed through the labor-capital struggle. I hope that movements may borrow from this highlighted connection, in an understanding that how things are, is at least in part, a consequence of how they came to be. It is through historically informed mobilization, in-tuned to the racialized histories of capital-labor relations, that these strengthening struggles may begin to successfully take place.

³⁰ Lipsitz expresses the counter argument nicely, "Race-based social movements that have often seemed to social-movement theorists as expressions of unthinking racial essentialism, nationalism, and parochialism, as evidence of immature and unreflective allegiance to shared skin color and phenotype, in reality owe much of their existence to the ways in which those skin colors and phenotypes become meaningful in the United States largely through shared experiences with racialized places" (2011, 54).

"We're fighting because we are being destroyed. That is the reason for the daily fight, to try to change this."

--Roberto Ortega, UFCW union worker-member
Tar Heel Smithfield Plant, in Bacon 2011

APPENDIX

UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS OF AMERICA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The interview excerpts used in this thesis are from the United Packinghouse Workers of America Oral History Project. There are 300 tapes of interviews deposited in the Archives Reading Room, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison WI 53703.

From 1985-1986, Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz conducted 128 interviews primarily with members and former members of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (CIO). The interviews concern the interviewees' personal backgrounds, experiences during the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee era, the formation of the UPWA and the growth of government regulation in the 1940s, internal dissension, the aggressive national union civil rights policy and its implementation on the local level, the role of women in the UPWA, union organization and operation within the plants, various job actions and strikes, and plant closings and the decline of the union in the 1960s.

In the summer of 2012, I traveled to the Wisconsin Historical Society. For four weeks I transcribed interview sets, focusing on the sites of Chicago and Fort Worth (highlighted below). Below is the summary chart of interviews and themes created by the original interviewers, Halpern and Horowitz.

Summary Chart of Interviews and Themes

Reproduced from the Wisconsin Historical Society's Descriptive Finding Aids,
<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/wiarchives.uw-whs-mss00698>

The chart below comprises a complete list of the interviewees. They are classified by their primary urban area of residence and the packinghouse where they spent most of their working career. A few non-packinghouse workers who were interviewed because of other factors are listed as "other" under their place of residence. Union staff members who were not packinghouse workers are designated "union staff." A "miscellaneous" category includes five interviewees who did not fit into the chart for various reasons. A list of interviewees in tape number order is at the end of this document.

To aid the researcher, there are several designations on the chart to provide information at a glance on each interviewee. These are:

- * -- union founder
- B -- black
- W -- white
- M -- Mexican
- AD -- anti-discrimination
- WA -- women's activities
- IP -- internal politics
- SF -- shop floor dynamics
- TN -- tape number

The first group of designations appears immediately adjacent to the name of the interviewee. The second group of four is arranged in columns after the names. An “x” in the column indicates that the interview contains worthwhile material on that subject. The last column indicates the tape numbers of the particular interview. At the end of the chart there is a discussion of the information available in each subject category. The sex of each interviewee can be deduced from their first name.

	AD	WA	IP	SF	TN
AUSTIN					
<u>Hormel</u>					
Winkels, John (W)*			<u>x</u>		
Winkels, Casper (W)*				x	36-37
Halligan, Lyman (W)*	<u>x</u>		<u>x</u>		38-39
Casey, Marie (W)*		<u>x</u>			43-44
MacAnally, James (W)				x	45-46
Sissel, Rollo (W)				x	40-41
Losey, Paul (W)				x	42
Shatek, Richard (W)				x	97-99
Taylor, Dave (W)				x	97-99
Johnson, Bob (W)				x	97-99
Godfredsen, Svend (W)*	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	<u>x</u>	x	97-99
					143-150
<u>Other</u>					
Rasmussen, Paul (W)			<u>x</u>		
					281-283
CEDAR RAPIDS					
<u>Wilson</u>					
Lange, Ray (W)					
Townsend, Louise (W)					104-107
Hammond, Jeanette (W)					110-112

Fields, Magnolia(B)	x			x	110-112
Zarudsky, Helen (W)					118-119
Carr, Earl (B)	x				108-109
Rowena, Lester (W)					113-115
Hlavacek, Frank (W)				x	104-107
Tickal, Louis (W)*				x	104-107
Blumenshine, Don (W)*				x	104-107
Melsha, Stella (W)*					102-103
Melsha, Jack (W)*					100-101
Fetter, Tony (W)	x	x	x	x	100-101
Achenbach, Lloyd (W)*				x	120-122
					116-117

Other

Gibson, Viola(B)	x				
					141-142

CHICAGO

Armour

March, Herbert (W)*	x		x		
Norman, Milton (B)	x			x	1-2;293-298
Samuel, James (B)					19-22
Tate, Todd (B)	x		x	x	19-22
Saunders, Richard (B)*	x		x	x	11-12;19-22;23-25
					11-12;19-22

Swift

Starr, Vicky (W)*		x	x	x	
Weightman, Philip(B)*	x		x	x	234-236
					284-292

Wilson

Hayes, Charles (B)	x		x	x	
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Collins, Annie J. (B)					151-153
Parks, Sam (B)	x		x	x	11-12
					30-31
<u>Independent Plants</u>					
Wyatt, Addie (B)	x	x	x		
Taylor, Rosalie (B)					54-56
Allen, Ercell (B)					15-16
Vaughn, Jesse (B)*			x	x	15-16
Pierce, Eunetta (B)	x	x		x	32-33;299-300
					13-14

CUDAHY, WI

Patrick Cudahy

Nielsen, Harold (W)	x		x		
Tarnowski, Leona (W)		x			3-5
Thoenes, Ervin (W)*	x				34
Becker, Joe (W)*	x				6;35
					6

EAST ST. LOUIS

Armour

Davenroy, William (W)*	x				
Madakitis, John (W)*			x	x	214-216
Condellone, John (W)*			x	x	220-223
Nash, William (B)	x				220-223
Miller, Curtis (B)					209-211
Peoples, Clyde (B)	x				219
					217-218

Swift

Randall, Blackie (W)					
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212-213

FORT WORTH

Armour

Wallace, Frank (B)*	x		x	x	
Niedholdt, Kenneth (W)				x	75-78
Salinas, Mary (M)	x	x	x	x	94-96;191
Jones, Hattie (W)					85-88
Williams, L.C. (B)	x				89-90
Humphrey, Eddie(B)	x		x		82-84
					79-81

Stockyards

McCafferty, Charles B. (W)	x		x		
					91-93

KANSAS CITY

Armour

Block, Finis (B)*	x			x	
Fischer, Charles R. (W)*	x		x		247-249
Krasick, Thomas (W)*					263-266
Isom, Nevada (B)				x	275-277
Houston, Virginia (B)	x	x			261-262
					278-280

Wilson

Bailey, Walter (B)*	x				
Raspberry, William (B)	x		x		273-274
					250-253

Cudahy

Simmons, Marian (B)	x	x	x	x	
					254-260

Other

Krasick, Ann (W)

275-277

OMAHAArmour

Romano, Fred (W)*

x

Peterson, Nels (W)*

x

185-186

Watson, Betty (W)

x

162-163

Dappen, Emerson (W)

x

166-168

Moore, Rowena (B)

x

x

x

157-159

175-178

Swift

Myers, Vic (W)

x

x

Graham, Max (W)

x

x

x

x

154-156

Early, Homer (B)*

x

182-184

Harris, James C. (B)*

x

x

x

160-161

Fletemeyer, George (W)*

x

x

x

172-174

Cassano, Herb (W)*

x

187-190

169-171

Cudahy

Salters, Steve (W)

Poe, Darryl (W)*

x

x

164-165

Mason, Walt (W)*

x

x

179-181

Dappen, Jeannette (W)

179-181

157-159

Other

Fletemeyer, Francis (W)

ST. JOSEPH

187-190

Armour

Chambers, Clyde (W)*

Thompson, Buford (B)	x		x	239-241
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Crowley, Eugene (B)	x	x	x	271-272
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Carter, Marjorie (B)	x	x	x	242-244
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Webster, William (B)			x	242-244
				245-246

SOUTH ST. PAULCudahy

Giannini, Henry (W)*		x	x	
				57-59;67-70

Swift

Nolan, William (W)*		x	x	
				57-59;60-63

Armour

Wicke, Chris (W)*

Cooper, Jake (W)				57-59;71-72
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Winters, Don (W)				73-74
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57-59

Other

DeBoer, Harry (W)

Hall, Douglas (W)		x		59
				64-66

SIOUX CITYCudahy

Shuck, Jenny (W)*	x	x		
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Nolan, Bruce (W)*		x	x	207-208
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Holbrook, Grant (W)*		x	x	204-206
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204-206

Armour

Wensel, Clyde (W)*			x	
Edwards, Alvin (W)*				194-196
Edwards, Mary (W)*			x	199-200
Davis, Sam (B)	x			199-200
				201-203

Swift

Hilsinger, James (W)*				
Callender, Loren (W)				192-193
				197-198

WATERLOO

Rath

Lamb, Goldie (W)				
Bremmer, Lucille (W)		x	x	x 140
Jones, Viola (W)				x 123-125
Porter, James (B)	x			127-128
Pearson, Charles (B)	x		x	x 135-136
Dietz, Everett (W)				224-227
Dietz, Vernon (W)*				126
Taylor, Lyle (W)	x	x	x	126
Mueller, Charles (W)	x	x	x	x 133-134
Treadwell, Ada (B)	x	x		x 139;232-233
Weems, Anna Mae (B)	x	x		x 228-229
Schrader, Velma Otterman (W)*		x		x 137-138
Burt, Robert (B)*	x			x 131-132
				129-130;230-231

Union Staff

Alston, Harry (B)	x
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Cotton, Eugene (W)			51-53
Dolnick, Norman (W)		x	28-29
Fischer, Charles (W)	x		26-27
			49-50
<u>Miscellaneous</u>			
Hill, Herbert (W)	x	x	
Lefkowitz, Hy (W)			x 8-10
Pittman, A. J. (W)*		x	237-238
Schultz, Robert (W)*			267-270
Prosten, Jesse (W)*	x	x	7;17-18
			47-48

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